Oregon County

Growing Up

by

Bill F. Combs

Sponsored by The Oregon County History Club

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This is a book of non-fiction, for the most part and as much as can be remembered of days gone by, peppered by the Author's imagination and interpretation. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations or persons, living or dead, is entirely intentional.

Some of the language is in the vernacular and sounds of how Oregon County people talked and do not follow grammatical guidelines.

This book is a result of storytelling by Bill F. Combs of growing up in Oregon County, Missouri in the 40's and 50's. He posted these stories on Facebook and gave all publishing rights to the Oregon County History Club to preserve yesterday.

The Oregon County History Club has actively published works by local authors, historians, artists, and photographers. Other books and multimedia projects are in queue. Many members have contributed countless hours in gathering the information and mastering the process for these publications.

We are looking for new stories and family histories.

Back Home Pubs has digitally published the following books:

Oregon County Summary History Book - June 2014
Oregon County History Book 1 - A reprint - September 2014
Princess of Umpapa by Eva Ford - November 2014
Oregon County Growing Up by Bill F. Combs - December 2014

All books are available on amazon.com

Some are available as Kindle books.

I dedicate this book to the Historical Society of Oregon County and in memory of my youngest daughter, Kristin Joy Settles, who passed away October 15, 2010, at the age of 38.

Bill F. Combs

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INTRODUCTION by Bill F. Combs

Each story in this book is written with my love of the past life I lived in Oregon County, Missouri. Writing these stories has turned back the clock of time many times for me. It is my desire that it will do the same for you.

One of the purposes for the book is to remind you of your forgotten past and let you relive just a bit of that past and remember friends. You will wonder about them now, as you relive your own story.

Each story can be a reminder of, "I did that when I was little and I had forgotten." You will place yourself back to those days and can share them with your kids and grandkids. Hopefully, this book will bring stories of the olden days that your children will be interested in and in a way of life that they are not familiar with, because you had forgotten yourself.

Many stories that I have told have branded me as, "Bill, the old story teller." I have on several occasions had a granddaughter and her husband and other children request that I come to the front porch of my house, set in my rocking chair and talk to them. After a few minutes they will say, "Grandpaw, would you tell us some stories about when you were a kid and how things was then?" I was not really grandpaw to some of them, but that's just what they wanted to call me. They will move in close not wanting to miss a word. You can see their faces light up and their brains thinking as the stories are being told. So, I guess what I am saying, it is not that the modern day children aren't interested. But rather many have buried those memories so deep they cannot bring them up on their own to tell the kids of today, so the stories can be considered lost.

Each story takes one back into a time of happiness, no matter how bad the situation was that you are telling about. The purpose of this book is to bring real history back into our lives. The part of history about your life that has been

buried can be brought to the surface, by hearing something in this book that you remember well in your own childhood days. A story in the book will help you resurface it.

The stories in this book will hopefully be passed on from generation to generation with a special place in your library for it. The book contains some fictional stories in parts of it about families from away places coming to settle in Oregon County, Missouri. Families that wanted these stories written could give me names where they were coming from to Oregon County, and where they settled, such as the Huffman family. The story would have to be passed down to me in order to write the story and it would be how I thought things might have happened along the way. This story of how my grandfather, Elihue "Bunk Combs" and his brother Nath is included as partly fictional, partly the history we were told.

Most of these stories were written from finding a big dry dirt spot on my property and drawing a map of states with a long stick. I learned about the terrain and imagining what problems I might have if I was leading a wagon train myself. I knew my grandfather had spent two years in Illinois on his way from Indiana. I came to a good conclusion because I heard his brother Nath's wife kept having kids on the trip. But this was my own conclusion.

I hope the book on this type of story will put you on a good horse or in a covered wagon and after you finish reading it, you will swipe some dust from your britches' legs.

In those olden days, the family rules in the content of this book might be unlawful today, but you will remember how those rules got the job done. I hope the content of this book will remind you of daily things you see and take you back to the olden days of how it was done then. You will see in this book a little boy who asked his Dad a lot of questions because he wanted to understand and make his Dad Happy.

One thing I could not properly describe on paper in this book, is the love, tears, and the big smile on thinking, why did I do that? And the joyful feeling of contentment that will surface from your own memories. I think in many ways the book will show you a love you haven't thought of before about Oregon County, Missouri.

Slow down and turn back that clock of life to your young days in Oregon County, Missouri or whatever county you lived in. The content of this book should pave the way to those memories and the deep love you may have buried for back home, wherever that is.

HEADED FOR OREGON COUNTY

This story is a fiction story but some names are real.
Thanks to Viki Reef Spector for contributing.

As the young scout who stayed with James Madison Huffman rode up, he was greeted, and his smile showed that he had a successful journey mapped out of the way that they would get to Oregon County. James and other Huffman families had their wagons in shape to start the long journey.

James and his wife Melissa were ready to start the long journey. Melissa was not a stranger to long journeys. She and James were married on a Cherokee Indian reservation in North Carolina but kept very quiet about their marriage. Nothing was known about the young Cherokee scout who came back from Carolina with them and stayed with them. His name was Tommy Hawk.

It was the year of 1876 in the early spring. When they entered Arkansas, the journey began to take its toll on the dusty trail that Tommy Hawk had laid out. The scout Tommy Hawk was young, but he was very experienced in riding ahead and laying out the trail for the next day having done it for others many times before.

The hills were steep, and Tommy Hawk had thought of a plan to get safely up and down those steep hills. His plan was that everyone would get out of the wagon, and the driver would control the horses from the ground. Everyone else would help the horses by pushing the wagon from behind. When getting to the top of a hill, the wagon would be stopped, and the horses were on top of the steep hills. Going down the hills could present a real danger to all, even the horses, but Tommy Hawk had figured that out also.

The six wagons had two saddle riders that would ride by each wagon about every hour and check to see if everything was OK with the Huffman family in the wagon. Then they would ride a short distance behind the wagons for about an hour and then again check each family wagon and ride in front of the wagons for about an hour. They rotated so one would be in front and the other in the back at all times.

Tommy Hawk had a new job for them to do also when they entered the steep hills of Arkansas. He instructed that one tie his rope around the right side of the axle of the wagon and the other to do the same on the left side of the axle. The ropes would be run back and be tied to the saddle horn. This would keep the iron rim around the wooden wheel from burning up the handbrake that

run up to the driver's side. This proved to work well. It was slow going up the steep hills but going down was no problem, because the riders would keep the wagon at the right speed. But many days only three hills could be traveled over.

James Madison Huffman knew Tommy Hawk had chosen a good trail because there were springs everywhere, and the wildlife was plentiful. Never a day after they had entered Arkansas did they have to ration food or water. They took the water barrels off all the wagons except the supply wagon to make the load lighter. He trusted and knew Tommy Hawk well and sometimes called him son in Cherokee language.

Each day Tommy Hawk would ride out with his eight foot pole with a white cloth on top of it to mark a trail and find a camping place for that night. He had a place made from leather in the cloth saddle where the sharp end of the pole would rest, and the white cloth would fly above him.

Day after day went by with hard work for all to do. The men had to grease the axles at the end of the day. The women had to prepare a meal for all. They would prepare midday lunch for the next day in the evening also because each family ate while they were moving. Way before dawn each morning, there would be a big fire glowing that would signal for the kids to get up. The women would be making coffee, bread, and gravy.

Every wagon had to be ready to roll at daylight on Mr. Huffman's command. Melissa seemed to become the leader of the women because she was so much more experienced than the others.

Tommy Hawk told Mr. Huffman about a three wagon train that he had seen in the distance on the day before. He had rode over with his white flag up and talked to them. He said the people were struggling to get over the hills. He gave them instructions that would help them. He said they tried to get me to go with them, but Tommy Hawk said, "No." They said they were headed for Oklahoma. Tommy Hawk did not tell them of our wagon train because it would have given us more responsibility if they did join us.

Many days went by and then Tommy Hawk came in the camp and went directly to Mr. Huffman. Tommy Hawk talking excitedly, "I found the big blue water hole and the Oregon County of Missouri is just a short distance from it."

We are within one short days drive from it. Mr. Huffman then asked, "Is the blue water place big enough to camp there for a couple of days and enough water for the horses?"

Tommy Hawk used an expression that he had heard other scouts use when they were bragging about how big their kill was. Tommy Hawk said, "It is a mammoth spring!"

The next day the wagons started rolling early because of the excitement Mr. Huffman had in finding out how close they were to Oregon County. As Tommy Hawk and the two riders placed the wagons after getting to the spring, there was a cheer. The kids were running with excitement. The water was cold and refreshing when they dipped their gourd dippers into the water for a good drink. One of the kids had entered the water and come out telling the others, "That is really cold water!"

After a few hours, Tommy Hawk approached Mr. Huffman and asked him if he could go over into Oregon County and check out a rumor that had been told to him by the Cherokee Indians. He also wanted to see what type of homesteads the Huffman families would have to pick from. He rode off with his white cloth on the pole. Tommy Hawk was lucky he found what he had heard about very easily.

Tommy Hawk rode back into the camp about noon the next day and wanted to talk to Mr. Huffman in private. Tommy Hawk told Mr. Huffman that he had found a beautiful place not too far from where they were in Oregon County. Tommy Hawk went on to say, there are Cherokee Indians living there in a huge hole in the ground. I talked to the Chief Lightfoot for some time. They are friendly and very smart on how they have survived attacks for many moons. He said we would be welcome to bring the wagons and talk to him. Chief Lightfoot has his tribe in a big hole with steps built up some and a big ladder that runs to the top. They take the ladder down at night so no one can get down in the hole to harm them.

Tommy Hawk told Mr. Huffman that the trip could be made in one long day, but he wanted to camp about an hour from the big hole of Chief Lightfoot. He did not want to enter after the sun had gone down. Many times other Cherokee warriors have tried to rob and kill them but were unable to. His braves have had to kill some long ago who tried to come down with ropes. He put them on Indian burial pads about six foot off the ground. The god of big winds did not like them and sent strong winds and blew them away. "The Chief and I talked and shared until the moon was high," Tommy Hawk told Mr. Huffman.

Mr. Huffman seemed delighted that the Cherokees were there and the next morning he circled all the Huffman families and made an announcement. He pointed his finger towards Oregon County and said, "It was a short distance away, and they would start a little later and take the wagons close to a place Tommy Hawk calls the Grand Gulf Hole. We will camp near there, and we will

have a short day. Tomorrow we will rise as usual, and when we see smoke in the air, we will go towards it."

As the wagons left the big mammoth spring, the families looked back and was hoping they would see it again. The excitement of homesteading kept a lot of the families from getting a good nights sleep when they camped near the hole, because they were thinking, "I will have a place of my own."

Tommy Hawk mounted his horse with the pole that has the white cloth on it and soon was back without the pole. Mr. Huffman gave him permission to speak to all of the families. Tommy Hawk instructed them to follow him and not to get any closer to the big hole than his pole with the white cloth on it. When they arrived, the families could see the big gulf hole and about ten braves standing in front of it.

Chief Lightfoot was setting at the pole. Tommy Hawk instructed Mr. Huffman to set on the opposite side facing the Chief. A few seconds was spent just staring at one another; then the Chief raised his hand from the elbow up and said, "Hello," in Cherokee language. Tommy nudged Mr. Huffman to do the same.

The Chief then looked towards the wagons and said, "Where is your squaw Melissa?"

Tommy Hawk then looks at the chief and said, "I will bring her and set her here beside Mr. Huffman."

While Tommy Hawk was gone the Chief said to Mr. Huffman, "Good scout you got there. He has told me all about you. Only my squaw and I will ever know what he told us."

Tommy Hawk came back with Melissa and set her beside Mr. Huffman. Her face was full of smiles and glory. Melissa could speak Cherokee very well, and Mr. Huffman could also communicate in Cherokee but not as well as Melissa. Chief Lightfoot said, "Only Cherokee blood can live here, and I will give you some of mine."

Tommy Hawk knew what the Chief was talking about and pulled his big knife out of the leather holster. He walked over to the Chief, who already had his hand open and made a small gash in his palm that drew blood. Then he turned to Mr. Huffman and did the same thing. Tommy Hawk instructed Mr. Huffman to reach out his hand and grip hands with the Chief. He released the hand. Mr. Huffman did as instructed until the Chief released the hand. The Chief said to Mr. Huffman, "You now have Cherokee blood, your squaw will not have to do this."

The Chief turned and motioned for one of his braves to go into the hole and bring his squaw to him. Very soon the brave and squaw came out of the hole. She immediately set her eyes on Melissa and her face was bright as the sun. She set down beside the Chief facing Melissa. They began to talk in Cherokee words. After a few minutes, Little Woman, the Chief's wife leaned over and whispered in his ear, and he nodded his head "Yes."

And Melissa, knowing what was going on, stood up and so did Little Woman. They walked to Mr. Huffman and Melissa's wagon. Melissa reached in and brought out a long string of beads and placed them around Little Woman's neck. Little Woman had tears in her eyes as she hugged Melissa very tightly, and a strong friendship was formed.

Mr. Huffman explained to Chief Lightfoot that the Missouri part of the United States was giving pale faces a right to homestead, and he would like to homestead the area. Chief Lightfoot said, "You are now a very kind and gentle Cherokee, so have your families build cabins here. But I would like to have your cabin close because Little Woman and Melissa are great friends. She is the first person outside of the hole that she has met in many moons."

The Huffman cabins went up fast because the braves enjoyed being out of the hole, and they felt safe with cabins around. Melissa and Little Woman sat together and talked every day as the two room cabin with a big rock fireplace was being finished.

There was a mild winter and spring soon came. The braves seemed to enjoy the turning of the soil and the planting of seeds.

Tommy Hawk came out into the field riding fast and told Mr. Huffman that Wolf, Chief Lightfoot's son wanted to talk to him at the white cloth pole. Mr. Huffman mounted, and when they got to the pole, Wolf was sitting and waiting. Mr. Huffman and Tommy Hawk sat on the other side of the pole. Wolf's face was filled with both sadness and anger. After a few seconds, he reached over and took the pole and threw it several yards from a sitting position.

Wolf then said,"My father Chief Lightfoot has died. The tribe has chosen me as Chief. You have taught the tribe well about the soil. We have lived in that hole many moons. A rider come by and showed me Government papers showing we can have a large reservation in Oklahoma and they will get us there. It's time to get out of that great gulf hole where the tribe can enjoy the sun, so we are leaving."

When Melissa got the news, she was heartbroken. Melissa had gotten weak and was coughing a lot. And as time went on she was coughing blood and she died of tuberculosis.

Mr. Huffman did not fare well after her death and spent a lot of time around the grand gulf hole trying to comfort himself. After many moons Mr. Huffman met a woman by the name of Eliza Ann Jackson, married her, and they had seven children. Time passed fast, and the old homestead had been passed on to several generations.

George Washington Huffman had a daughter, Mary Elvira Woodrow Huffman (she was known by the nickname "Woodie"). She had a son by the name of Harold Reef who attended and graduated from Thayer high school in 1945. After graduation, he went directly into the Navy, leaving Oregon County, but Oregon County did not leave him.

After getting out of the Navy he desired a good education which was something his ancestors did not have. He graduated from University of Tulsa with a commercial art degree. He traveled many states but would think Oregon County was the most beautiful place in the world. Age caught up with him. He decided he wanted to come back to Oregon County and be with his mother on her farm outside of Thayer. He did, and set up a business of printing.

He did many of the road signs for the state of Missouri. He had a daughter who also graduated from Thayer High school and left Oregon County after graduation. Her name is Viki Reef Spector. She also had fond memories of seeing the old Huffman homestead, which was part of her family.

She came home to see her dad in 2010, and wanted him to go with her to the old homestead, which was by the Grand Gulf. He was excited that he was going to get to see again where he played as a kid. His age had taken its toll on him, and he had lost his mother, but still he was determined.

They stopped at the Grand Gulf and he wanted to go to the bottom where the water comes out of the rocks. He told Viki stories about when he was a young kid. It was deep enough that he swam in it and how they drank the water coming from the rocks.

The Lord must have given Harold's legs enough strength to see it one last time. As they left the Grand Gulf, he took one last look and then his mind turned to the old house on the homestead. Questions ran through his mind, "I hope the old house is still standing." He told stories of what used to be. All at once he raised himself a little off the seat and said, "There it is! That's the old house!"

He and Viki tried looking through the windows and could not see much. They walked around to the breezeway window and Harold pointed out to Viki the room where the big table used to be. The family would gather on holidays and have big meals. George Washington Huffman would be setting at the head of the table and if one of the kids misbehaved he would get up, grab their ear and pinch it.

Old Reef Homestead

After looking in this window, Viki saw that her dad was looking strange. So she walked away from him as he stood in the front yard looking at the old house. The old house seemed to be talking to him. "Is that you Harold? You have changed and grown old like me. Harold is that your kid over there?"

Harold was answering the old house in his mind. Then the old house seemed to say, "I am glad you stopped by to see me. Don't have much company anymore. Two old ghosts come to see me now and then, but they don't have much to say." The old house continued, "I remember when James brought a block of white lead and mixed it with linseed oil and covered me with it. I was so pretty and white. I was even proud of myself. But when you get old, you're not made pretty anymore."

Harold looked back at the car at his daughter Viki and said, "I guess it's time to go."

The old house said, "We may not get to visit again because we are both getting old." The old house continued, "I would like to say, goodbye, old man."

And Harold in his mind said, "Goodbye old house."

Harold's dream was fulfilled. He died about three weeks later.

GOODBYE MR. HUFFMAN AND MELISSA, AND TO ALL, YOU HAVE PASSED ON BUT THE OLD HOUSE STILL STANDS.

Comments:
Got a question, do any of you knows how Mr. Fred Reef fits into this? We traded farms and gave him some boot around 1947 or 1946. -Clifton Jewell

I don't. This is the first time I had heard this! Love history and this truly is a story of history!! -Ann Kish

Thank you so much. My grandmother was named Mary Melissa Emmaline Huffman. She married Elmer Cornelius. -Patti Cornelius Floyd

Clifton Jewell, Harold Reef's mother was the daughter of George Washington Huffman. I may be wrong but I think I am right. I know nothing about the family except through Viki Reef Spector and I am sure she could answer the question. Remember this story is fiction, I just got on the wagon and rode. -Bill F. Combs

Hmm, was Harold Fred's dad? I think Fred's wife was named Juanita. Which might have been a Jewell. -Clifton Jewell

Patti, My brother, Don Springfield gave your dad the hearth stones from the old Cornelius homeplace which was a part of the Huffman homestead. I believe he incorporated them into his fireplace.. -John W Springfield

Loved, loved, loved this.... -Gwen Stites

A LONG STORY ABOUT MY FAMILY A LONG, LONG TIME AGO

The names in this story are real people but some of the information is just hearsay and things I have read. It cannot be used as history facts. Early generations of my family used the same name as another member of the family because they could tell someone how to write it or try to copy it. For this reason, most of my early relatives had nicknames so they could tell which person we would be talking about.

In 1790 my distant grandfather was born and he was called Old John Combs. In the late 1790's he was married to a lady that they just called Mother Combs after she got married. I have been told that she was never named and was called, "Hey You". She was born Indiana.

They lost most of the children from illnesses and Indian attacks. The two children that survived were named Nathan Combs who was born in 1825 and Elihue Combs who was born in 1834.

Nathan married Lucy Pool who was also born in 1825. The illnesses of this

time took her life and then he married Jane Pickett who was born in 1830. The two sons Nathan and Elihue moved to Vigo county, Indiana, because of Indian problems and would be near Terre Haute, Indiana, on the Wabash River. They had a big Army fort there and it was better protection from the Indians. Many families lived inside or just outside of the fort, because if there was an attack they could go into the fort for safety. The Indians did not want to attack there as much as other places.

Nathan started having children. Elihue was a hunter and trapper and he loved to be adventurous. He liked going out into the middle of nowhere and hunting and trapping for two or three weeks at a time. Tricking the Indians was easy, because he knew what they thought and how they would attack. He rode into the fort one day and he asked Nathan, "Do you think you could stop having kids for awhile because we are going to be headed for Oregon County, Missouri. So I will give you a week to get your wagons ready. Don't forget a barrel of salt and flour." Now, Elihue was the boss from now on, because Nathan had just told a group of people about God and took care of a little piece of land that they grew crops on that a man let them use.

Nathan had children that had names that were in the Bible. His childrens names were: Shadrack, Misshack, Abednigo, Isaac, Nancy and Hannah. Nathan was the thinker and the educated one, if'n there was such thing. He told Elihue that if they traveled through Illinois to Missouri, they had a kin that lived in Clay county, Illinois that they could stop for awhile and camp on his property. Elihue agreed. Nathan then said, "There will be no traveling on Sundays. We will have church and I will preach, no matter where we are."

Elihue said, "There is no problem there Nathan. I have always respected what God called you to do and you have always respected me for what God called me to do." Elihue continued and said, "On some of my hunt'n trips, I know a place we can cross the Wabash River and it's not too far over into IIlinois."

He continued, "Here's the plan, Nathan. We will fill our water barrels after we get across the river. My wife, Elzina will drive our wagon. (Her name was Emmaline Elina.) You drive your wagon and your wife Jane can drive the supply wagon. I will go out early every day and mark a trail and set the traps, so we will have fresh meat at the end of every day. Then I will go out and mark the trail for the next day and come in every evening to tell you about difficulties we might have. I will leave a few flags so you will know you are on the right direction. But I will go back after you have gone through and pick up the flags and my traps so I can mark the trail for the next day for you. I will also locate water and we will try to keep the barrels full. Don't think that will be much of a problem because there was a lot of springs when I trapped in those areas we will be in. I am purty

sure we will have plenty of sweet water and just use the barrels for a back up."

Jane spoke up and said, "I ain't going unless I can take Daisy with us."

Elihue said, "Might not be a bad idea to take her and have fresh milk. Over there in my huntn stuff is two long ropes that I use to rope those big critters with and drag them out to where I want to shoot them when I am trapping. Get one of those and tie Daisy behind the wagon and that should not be any problem."

Nathan's two boys, Shadrack and Misshach were excited and ready to go.

Elihue said, "Ready to roll. Nathan, just go down the river and I will mark a place to cross. Youins just camp there after you get across and I will be back later. I am going to mark tomorrow's trail out."

After a long trip they came to Clay County, Illinois and found their kinfolks who were really happy to see them. They said, "Youins can build a little cabin down yonder in the field ifn you would like and we would be neighbors."

Elihue was quick to say, "Oh, no, we won't be here long. We will build a tepee out of some of the timber and put a five gallon container in it for the women to go into when they feel the urge. Shadrack will carry it over by the woods and empty it each day. I will be furnishing youns with plenty of fresh meat."

And then they got busy doing what had to be done.

Nathan told Elihue while they were working, "I need to talk to you."

Elihue replied, "Go ahead. Ain't nobodies around but youse and me."

Nathan said, "Well it's this way, I guess I got Jane in a motherly way somewhere and I don't want her riding on that wagon over the rocks. If I go on with you, it will have to be after the baby is born. Our kin said that they didn't have a regular preacher at their church and wanted to know ifn I would preach to them. He told me that they had a box on the wall inside the front door. The preacher gets all the money that the people puts in there. He also said we could farm his land as he wasn't able to do it any more. I will do the farm when you're out trapping and preach on Sundays."

Elihue looked disgusted and said, "I'll be d-- " ."

Before he could get that last word out, Nathan said, "The Lord has been

L-R: James (Jim), Elihue (Bnk), John, Nath, Mary, Betty, and Barm Combs

good to us and he has led us safely here like he did Moses and the children of Israel."

Elihue, said "Stop it Nathan, I'm not in the mood to hear one of your sermons right now."

They decided if the child was in good health it could travel in six months. The baby of Nathan and Jane was born and they named him, Abednego. Everything was going pretty well and Elihue had moved another five gallon bucket in the Tepee, just for pee to tan his hides with.

About two months later, Nathan told Elihue that he needed to talk to him again and said, "I thank Jane is in a motherly way again."

Elihue looked at him with a pale face saying, "Nathan if you don't stop having kids, we will never make it to Oregon County, Missouri."

They decided that they would stay set and wait until this baby was about four months old to travel. Things had gone good in Illinois. They had even saved some money. For Nathan at church, the money was growing and sometimes the box would have a dollar or dollar and a half in it. It was different than when he first started when it had a quarter in it that he had put in himself.

What seemed like no time atal, another boy was born and they named him Isaac. Elihue said to Nathan "In four months we head towards Oregon County, Missouri."

Three months had passed and Elihue was doing good, trapping. He had a good hide buyer. He had saved some money and that was one thing he was thankful for. Again, in about two months Nathan said to Elihue, "I really hate to tell you this. but Jane is in a motherly way again."

Elihue took off his fur coon tail cap off and threw it in the dusty ground saying, "Nathan, I don't know how to do it, but you gotta stop that. You might orta pay more attention to preaching and less time making love to Jane. We ain't never going to get to Oregon County, Missouri with you having all these kids. Have you ever heard the word indulging? You might find it in your Bible."

Nathan felt bad and said it wouldn't happen again until they finished their trip. Jest maybe this is a good thing, the Lords will. Nathan promised Elihue that he would stop carrying the blanket into the woods with Jane at night.

Elihue said, "Ok, Nathan, trapping is purty good here and I want to have saved enough money for a farm in Oregon County."

The time passed fast and a baby girl was born and was named Nancy. She was a healthy baby and they decided in two months they started towards Oregon County again.

In Oregon County there were a lot of springs for sweet drinking water. They met a trapper on the trail and asked him what county they were in and the trapper said, "Oregon County." Elihue asked the man if he knew of a place called, "Myrtle."

The man said, "I sure do. I've done trapping over there and it a purty good trapping area."

Just then a smile came over Elihue's face as he dreamed of good trapping. The man said, "It's not really a place yet but a man by the name of Charles Fillmore was trying to make it a place. His daughter is named Myrtle and that's why everyone calls it that."

Two days later they were talking to Mr. Fillmore and he was telling them about a farm that a man wanted to sell. Elihue and Nathan saddled up and found the farm. It was 80 acres and looked good from the front part. Elihue asked the

man, "Can we ride the property and look at it and see if it would be what we wanted?" The man agreed.

Even though Nathan was older, he did not know as much about farms as Elihue did, because he wanted to make preaching come first. As they rode the property everything looked perfect. It had good soil and a spring that run through the middle of it. They got off their horses and got a drink and it was good sweet water. Elihue said, "Now Nathan, I want you to not talk and let me do the dealing, because you are a preacher and not hard enough to deal."

When they got back the man was waiting outside the small cabin. Elihue told the man that it might work for them and asked, "Whatya asking for it?"

The man hesitated a few seconds and said "$250."

Elihue said, "We can find places cheaper than that, but I would give you $200 cash for the place."

The man hesitated as he look towards the ground and said, "Well you know my wife and I are getting kinda old and all we need is a little house close to a grocery store. I reckon I would agree on $200."

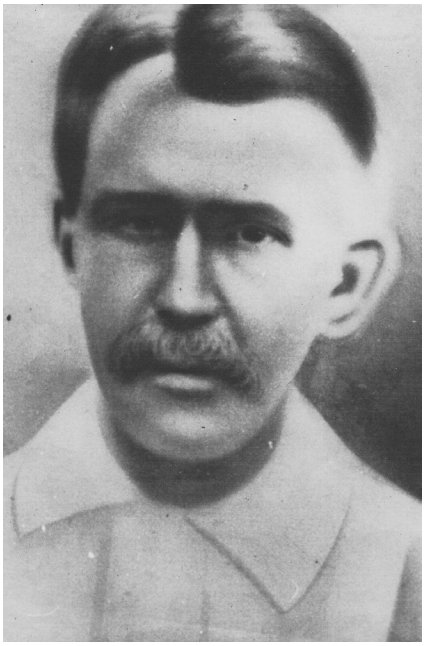
Elihue said, "Do you know where the courthouse in Oregon County is, so we can get the papers done?"

The man says, "It's a good days ride from here and it would be after dark when you got there. I tell you what let us do. You meet me here at five in the morning and we will head for Thomasville where the county seat and courthouse is. But you need to bring your bed roll and enough food to last for two days. We're going to have to have our horses in a trot most of the way."

He continued "I am going to pull my wagon up close to the front door where my wife can load everything while I am gone. I was talking to Mr. Fillmore not too long ago and there is an empty house in where they call Myrtle that I have enough money to buy now. Somebody is building a store there. It's within walking distance."

Late the next day they made it into Thomasville. Both commented that it was a purty big town and looked kinda wild.

Elihue told the man, "Don't worry. We will find a place to bed down." He patted the gun in his holster said, "This will protect us."



Elihue Combs

They were at the courthouse when the little one room log cabin opened up. After discussing what they wanted, the man handed them both a piece of paper and they both just looked at him. Neither one could read or write.

The man explained some of what the papers were and told them he would get someone to come in and witness their X's.

When they got back, Nathan had already moved the wagons to the place. The man's wife had what little furniture and other things they had on the wagon. Elihue had payed for the place. He would give Nathan the forty acres on the other side of the spring to build on. With a smile Elihue said, "Now you can't say I never give anything to the Lord."

The man had given Elihue the two cows that he sold. After a few years, Elihue was told that the trapping was good in Arkansas. He purchased a small place near Strawberry, Arkansas. This was during the Civil war and he had been out trapping for about a week and came home. The Kansas Jayhawkers had taken all his cows but one who had wandered off from the others. The Jayhawkers found out they had missed one and came back to get it. They had a shoot out. Elihue was shot in the shoulder and never recovered from his wounds. He died about 1875 somewhere around Clover Bend by the Black River. His wife moved back to Oregon County.

Now this story is about the Elihue above's son.

Elihue had kids and he named one of them Elihue also, and called him "Bunk" who was my grandfather. Bunk was born 1867. Bunk married Martha Jane Cypret in 1889 and she died when she was 26 years of age. Then he married Sarah Rosetta Price. They had three boys: Leonard C. Combs born 1896, Floyd Combs born 1898 (My Dad), and Willie (Wild Bill) Combs, born 1906.

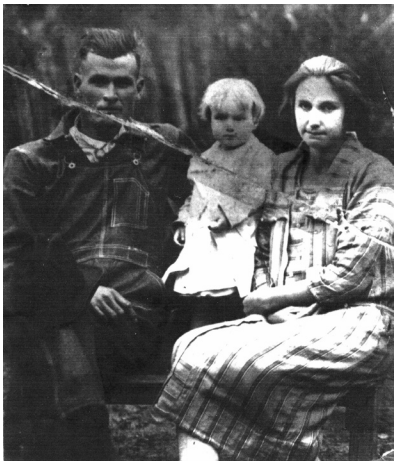
Rosetta died in 1906 and my Grandfather said, "That's it, I'll never marry again."

Bunk died in 1947 and I had the honor of being with him when he died.

ROOTS IN OREGON COUNTY

As a kid, I was born in a little log cabin just below the hill from Cotton Creek. My life began with adventure. Right after my mother gave birth to me a big black snake crawled out of the ceiling log wanting me. My father and midwife killed it. I don't know my mother's reactions. When I started remembering my life was when I was three or four years of age in the late thirties and early forties. I can remember when other women wanted to hold me and either pick me up or take me from my mother's arms.

I can remember well a lady that always wanted to pick me up and hold me. She would always say, "Yep, he is getting big. His goober is growing." I tried to avoid letting her pick me up because she smelt like salt pork and gravy, and had snuff running out both sides of her mouth. It was OK if women dipped snuff in public, but they had to leave their corn cob pipes at home because that wasn't acceptable. Most of them would smoke pipes at home and roll-your-owns in public. Some could even afford to go to the store and buy a pack of Lucky Strikes, Camels, or Phillip Morris.



Floyd (Dad), Helen (Sister), and Amanda (Mom)

I can remember the men rolling their own, and there was a real art to it. Some could roll a cigarette with one hand. My Dad told me he could roll one on horseback with the horse running full speed. He pointed at his bib overhauls one time and said, "See that big pocket on top? They made that for a pipe and the slit was made for your watch."

My dad had gotten a new pair of overhauls one time and put his pipe in the top bib pocket. It wasn't out good, and it burned a hole in the overhauls. He took the pipe out and threw it as far as he could and never smoked again.

Years passed fast. I was just four years of age when I started first grade. My sister, the teacher, did not pass me. So I took first grade for two years. By the time I was six, we had moved on top of the hill from Cotton Creek and then to Jobe. Then Dad sold our 360 acres at Jobe and bought a smaller farm three miles out of Alton.

By six years of age, I began considering myself a young man and thinking I could do anything my older brothers could do. The farm outside of Alton had a

decent smoke house about 20 yards or so from the house. My grandfather, Elihue (Bunk) Combs had taken ill. After a little fixing up on the smokehouse, Dad made him and me a place to sleep at night. We would have meals and stay at the house most days.

My grandfather and his brother Nathaniel (Nath) Combs were among the first settlers in Oregon County. My grandfather was not much of a talker about his past. He and his brother came from Vigo County, Indiana. He wouldn't say much about the trip to what now is Oregon County from Indiana, but they did have a stay in Illinois on the way.

He liked to talk about how things had changed in his lifetime and some about Thomasville. He talked about how people were able to go to grocery stores and buy food each week. When he was a boy you didn't go grocery shopping. You went once a year and picked up supplies for a year. Salt come in 850 pound barrels, and most of the supplies were shipped out of a little town called St. Louis on the river.

He commented that people back in 1943 went to the store and bought shells for guns. They use to make their own black powder out of sumac charcoal and saltpeter. There was a cave just out of Thomasville where some people made gun powder, but most people just made their own. He said that Thomasville sold some very fast horses. Grandpa died when I was about eight or nine. I wish I had asked him more questions about the trip and with other things I have often imagined in my mind.

Time went by too fast. I was going into the eighth grade. This would be the last year I would get support for school from Mom and Dad. Dad had a rule, when you finished the eighth grade you could stop school or go on through 12th grade, with very little support. Out of his eleven children that lived, all of us finished 12th grade. Dad had an eighth-grade education. He was living back in his time when that was a good education.

My dad told me some stories about his teen years and how he met my mother. He did not talk about those days a lot. Levi Garrett was wonderful to us boys. He would work us until we finished the 12th grade. Then he would work a younger one until he finished high school. He made a lot of Christmas joy for us by giving us fruit and ham at Christmas time.

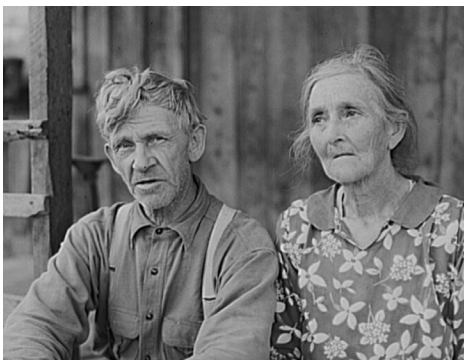
When I was a junior, I knew my brother four years younger than myself was going to need a place to work. Larry Wallace was kinda my idol when it came to working. I would try to imitate him at a fast pace. He offered me a job, and I went to work for him. My younger brother took my place at Garrett's. Larry

Wallace and myself became very close working buddies. He trusted me to run the store when he had to be out for some days with a bad back.

Alton businessmen became like fathers to me also, because I played basketball. They knew I was trying to be the best that I could. I knew my roots had gone deep in Oregon County, but for about four years I listened to the old timers about what was going on in St. Louis. They said men were making more in a couple of days than I was making in a week. They would come home on the weekends, so a yearning started in me to leave Oregon County to go make big money.

Oregon County must not have wanted me to leave because I had to make several tries to get over the hill at Greer Spring. Eventually I made it to St. Louis, and I hated it. I found myself in a different world and stayed just long enough to make enough money to get to Tulsa, Oklahoma. My brother had a job for me there.

I left Oregon County, but Oregon County did not leave me. Memories of Oregon County run clear and deep in my mind most every day. The hills and road are very recognizable even in dreams, comforting from far away from Oregon County where I have roots. The springs, rivers, and nice people will always call me back home. Every year, when I go back ,the latch string key seems always to be out.



Maw and Paw (Anonymous)

PEOPLE WHO ENJOY LIFE IN THE BACK WOODS OF OREGON COUNTY

This is a made up story of how back-woods could be. I am writing it just for fun. People sometimes thought these people were lazy, but to them it was resting before they got tared.

I have the feeling that there are people in the backwoods of Oregon County and how they lived a very simple life. One house in particular, had no glass in the windows to be broken, because animal skin with fur kept out the cold air. The big wood stove would keep the house warm until its wood would be burned up. Then there'd be a discussion on who needs to go get some more wood to put in the stove.

The Maw of the house did not have a great worry if the house wasn't neat. The beds were to sleep in and not to be made up. Paw would be setting in his big stuffed chair that showed plenty of wear smoking his corn cob pipe with his can half full of sand that he spit in when he was chewing. Maw would be

rocking in her big rocking chair. You might hear a conversation between Maw and Pa that sounded like this.

Paw said, "Maw, is it rainin outside?"

And she would keep rocking and answer back, "I don't know Pa, call the dogs in and see if they are wet."

Paw said, "The last time I was outter there on dat porch, looked like a couple of boards needed to be put in. Yep, someone told me about that and it had to be you, I'm going to fix it soon as I get around toit. Are those pans still holding all the water from the hole in the roof in the kitchen, Maw?"

Maw replied, "That's not a big problem Paw, the dogs keep them all drunk up."

Maw continued, "Paw, a man come to the door the other day."

Paw asked, "What did he want, Maw?"

Maw replied, "I don't know Paw. He ran off when I opened the door."

Paw said, "I heard someone bought that old farm about a walking hour down yonder on the gravel road."

Maw asked, "Paw, now where did you hear that? You hadn't been out of the house all winter."

"I don't know Maw, I guess dreamed it," replied Paw.

Maw said, "Now Paw, you know better than that. If dreaming is work, you don't dream."

Paw asked, "What are we having for supper Maw?"

Maw said, "Paw, I think I will fry up some of those taters you planted."

Paw said, "Maw, I didn't plant any taters."

Maw continued, "Well Paw, I will fix them anyways and you can think they are taters. I guess we will have the old hen that has been setting on the flour barrel at night. I want to get rid of her. I hate sifting that flour."

Paw scolded, "Maw, I have told you, I don't know how many times, turn her around at night."

Maw said, "Seen Mrs. Natter the other day walking out yonder in the woods. I went out and chewed a little fat with her. She was worried about her wrinkles, and I solved her problem. I told her to get the iron real hot and that would remove them. That's the way I take them out of our clothes. She is just a middle age hussie. I was thinking Paw about when we got married down there in the woods when that preacher come through about this time of year."

Paw Said, "Maw, it was during peach drying time. I remember well what that preacher said, we are getting married for better or worse. Maw, don't you get stuck up. I couldn't have done better and you couldn't have done worse."

I could go on because writing like this is fun. Sure hate to think what my wife is going to say when she reads this.

NOT SO POOR

We all have many stories inside that people are not willing to let out, because of the thought that people would know they were poor in Oregon County. I was from a poor family in Oregon County, but never thought of being poor. I am not ashamed of it today or ever, because someone told me we were poor, and that was the only way that I knew. In my thinking, we were very rich, but like many others did not have money.

Our wisdom was great in its own way. Our life was lived in a meaningful way without much expense. That alone would prove our wisdom. Many might not have had electricity, but we all kept warm and was comfortable. We did not have store bought clothes. Our mothers made them. We looked nice and in the style of the day. We were ahead of fashion. Just because we got a piece of ribbon candy and a fire cracker for Christmas didn't make us unhappy. We might not have gotten big store bought toys like many. But the love for Dad was great and the family had fun playing with the toys he had made and put his love into. Our family was at peace with ourselves.

Tell me again, I don't understand, was we poor or rich? You may say that we were "Both." Whichever one it was, I loved it and am not afraid to write about it. I would not have wanted my childhood to be any different than what it was in Oregon County, Missouri.

WORKING AS A FAMILY ON OREGON COUNTY FARM

I was setting here thinking, "When I was young, we did everything as a family." Not that I minded in any way of resting before we got started. Not that I minded Mom being one of the better at plowin than anyone in the family. Not that I minded Mom doing her fixing and not working with us on Saturday morning, where we could get to town sooner.

I see so many things different today. Men go fishing with their best friend. They may go out and hit a little white ball, hunt for it thirty minutes, and then lie about how many strokes it took to make a hole.

I don't guess I will ever learn anything about today's life. How in the world can a man go out and pay a big price for pants, shoes, shirt, and socks that they wouldn't wear to Wal-Mart on a rainy day? I guess some of those old boys have it lucky. They don't have tator bugs that ruin tator crops, and corn borers that destroy corn. I am not saying we did not have more fun living on that pile of dirt trying to make it grow a seed faster than anyone else. Ifn Dad went fishing, the whole family went fishing. Ifn Dad says, "Let's play a game." We didn't go choose a friend to play with; we played it as a family. Ifn we had a big stump out in the middle of the field that needed to be taken out, we did it as a family.

After trying to dig his hill in the ground, I have heard my Dad more than once say, "No wonder they built the town here, the dirt's so hard it wouldn't grow nuttin."

You can call me what you want but those family times will always still be in my blood. How can you not miss a wagon riding across the field with the iron skillets and pots packed with plenty of corn meal, flour, salt, and lard? What was the menu on this trip out to eat? We were hoping for fish but we would have a squirrel or two mixed in. How can you not miss the new bull that someone had bought and you are trying to figure out if he is safe or not? Only one way to know ifn he was safe and that was to test him. Crawl out on a limb by where he was standing in the shade and observe him closely. I was out on a limb. I told my brothers he looked safe to me, when all at once we heard a crack and my brother's answer back, "He is a lot safer that you are." So I started inching my way back to safety.

Now I am not putting down the ones who like different ways than I do but I enjoyed doing things as a family in Oregon County. We was happy as a family and not as one trying to run off and do his own thing. Still ain't figured out those golf clothes to this day.

Comments:
Bill, we were all poor insofar as money is concerned but that was not a big issue. I grew up greatly loved, don't remember being hungry or overly cold. I always had clean clothes to wear and they were often hand me downs but we didn't care. To have something new and store bought was especially exciting. Everyone in my family had chores we had to do but I didn't think about it because we all had chores and that was how it got done as a family and a team. If someone in the community had an especially hard time, neighbors shared what they had. We all grew big gardens so we ate what we grew and grew what we ate. We ate lots of chicken and lots of beans and potatoes. I still enjoy a pot of beans with cornbread. I am thankful for my upbringing in Oregon County. I am thankful for Godly parents that taught us well. I am also thankful my mother pulled the switches off of the peach tree and applied them to my backside. She taught me discipline. I learned the value of working and the value of working together as a family team. Work ethnic and family is getting lost in the rush of today and that is sad.
Vernon Warren

DAD TOLD ME STORIES OF HIS MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD

I got to thinking today about the modern things I have now that I didn't have as a child. Most of my brothers and sisters were born about two years apart, but there is four years difference between my younger brother and myself. I never asked Mom what happened, but it caused me to be the youngest child for more years than most of my brothers and sisters. There were 11 of us kids, and we had what most people back then considered an average number of offspring. A lot of my relatives had 19 to 21 kids.

I remember as a small boy my Dad and I were setting out on the porch, and he took his light brown cowboy hat off and put on his lap. Then he started telling me a story about when he was a young teen boy and how things had changed since then.

He began the story like this: "When I was young we did not have the modern things that you have today. (This was in about 1941)." He continued by saying, "We did not have a Victrola that you could crank on the side and hear someone sing on the record. We did not have a radio that we could listen to. We did not have a modern wood cook stove with a water tank to keep the water warm on the side of it."

"The way we entertained ourselves on the weekends was to ride our horses with a couple or three friends. We would go to a church and set outside and look and hear what was going on inside through the open windows. He told me that he had done some things at some of those churches he was sorry for and

had to live with it."

He said some of those little churches got pretty wild, and they would like to watch what was going on. He said that him and two of his buddies were standing outside of the window one night. The man on the inside was praying his heart out on his knees for the Lord to send fire down from heaven. He described that the man's shirt was up over the waistline and his pants were loose enough that you could see part of his rear. Dad's friend was about to put out a roll-your-own that he was smoking. He asked for it and told the friend that he was going to help God out a little and put it down the back of the man's pants. The man jumped up and continued shouting and headed towards the water bucket which sat up front with its dipper. When he got to the water bucket he set down in it and got up and the water bucket had wedged to him and he danced until the water bucket came off.

After each story that Dad told, he would reach up and scratch his head a little and then look at me. He would say, "That was a bad thing that I did, and I hope you never do bad things like that."

He always said that the name Combs had to be upheld, and if you didn't, you would not be a Combs. He never ended a story without saying, "You wouldn't be that way, would you? I wasn't very smart to do some of those things."

Now, here I am telling people that I didn't have the things you have today when I was growing up.

STORYTELLING IN THE OZARKS WAS AN ART

I loved to set around the square and hear stories that people were making up. Then once it was being told, they would slap their legs about at the knees and laugh their hearts out.

I decided I wanted to write a story like some of those people told. All I needed to do was set down at the computer and think back to those days. Oregon County had mostly hill people but not hillbillies. They did have some hillbillies back in my day. But they wasn't real visible and was sprinkled in the backwoods of the county.

This story is not true in some cases and true in other cases. Wait a minute I thought of a name, we will call the story, "THE COOLIE FAMILY." They called him Paw Coolie and she was called Maw Coolie. They probably rightly did not know how many kids they had. I will start by describing their home.

Mr. Coolie had worked as a janitor for two years in his early days; and retired from work when he was twenty-one. He said "Never cared much for that. They would try to get me to clean things that were already clean."

The home that they had built out of raw lumber set in the far backwoods. It was a modest home to them. They did not see any use in building a road up to their house because they had no car. Mr. Coolie said he had seen one on a couple of occasions. He thought they were just a novelty thing and would not last.

As you looked at the home, you would notice that it set about two foot off the ground, open on all sides. The boards that made up the outside of the house might not be real straight. Instead of having windows, they just cut a space where they wanted to look out. They didn't frame them, because they were going to be covered with plastic during the winter time anyhow. The plastic was fixed where it could be rolled up during the warm weather. Maw would put a quilt over the inside during cold weather.

After the house had been built, his oldest boy had done a good job on collecting old newspapers from other people on horseback by riding about 15 miles a day. Maw would cook up some wallpaper glue, and they would cover the walls with newspapers. The front porch was a place where the family talked some and slept on hot nights. The doors were up in the front and back with no door knobs. Instead, a small hole was drilled that the cord would go through and pull up the latch when the weather was cold enough to close the door. The cord was pulled in at night and left out in the daytime in the winter. During the summer the doors were not closed. The enclosed back porch had no door going outside on it. That is where Maw kept a barrel or flour and a barrel of meal.

They had a fine house. Paw was telling Maw how smart he was in having an older boy put on a wooden floor instead of having a dirt floor. He told Maw that his idea was that it would be a good place for the chickens to stay dry, and the hawgs, dogs, and goats would love it.

Maw replied, "I like the wood floor. When I sweep the floors, the dirt will go right down through the cracks."

The land and livestock had been passed down from generation to generation.

Paw said, "This is a much better house than the one that burnt down here."

Paw was setting rocking and smoking his pipe and looked over at Maw, and said, "Things are quiet, and the plastic has been taken off the windows. You have taken down the quilt. I don't hear the kids, I guess they all went down through the woods to the mailbox on the gravel road about three miles away."

Then he looks over at Maw and said, "How many kids do we have now, Maw?"

She was rocking with her pipe in her hand that she kept in the spit bucket beside each one of their chairs She was trying to decide if she wanted to light up the pipe or dip a little snuff. She looked over at Paw and said, "You know, I know a dollar bill, five dollar bill and a ten dollar bill and have seen at one time a $20 bill. I can count money, but I have trouble counting after ten and we got more than that."

Paw said, "I sure hope we get one of those big books that the big company sends out from some city, cause I like to look at the pitchers in them."

Maw replies, "I like them too. I can cut out some of those pictures and put on the walls for decorations."

Paw said, "I sure like the way you have everything fixed up."

Maw glances at him and says, "You wouldn't say that unless you wanted something."

Paw continued to look out the window and said, "The 9 and 10-year-old boys will not be going to school this fall. They tried, but found out like our oldest boy that he was smarter than they was. You remember he went to school for two days when he was ten and was in the first grade. The first day the teacher taught him that 2 plus 2 equals four and the next day the teacher said that 3 plus 1 equals four. He decided she was all mixed up and come on home. I always wanted my boys to have some schooling starting when they were about 9 or 10 years old, but I haven't had much luck. The other two, the teacher asked one of them what his name was and he told her. "Knothead" and she said, "I don't believe you."

He told her "That's what my Daddy calls me."

He got up and went over to his brother and said, "Come on Snothead, she won't believe you either. Come on home."

He continued talking, "I think I hear the kids coming now. Where you all been?"

One kid said, "We walked through the woods up to the mailboxes and got this big book, and the other boxes had them in it, plus some letters. Paw, it wouldn't have taken so long, but there was a girl up there that was Knothead's age. She walked real pretty and looked at Knothead funny with her eyes. Then she rushed over and kissed the side of his face and ran off into the woods. We also stopped half way back to let the little ones rest and looked at that big book."

Dad said, "Hope youns didn't tear it, because when that comes, I want to look at it first."

Paw looks over at Maw and says, "Somethin I have a need to do, and that is to talk to these kids about life. Let's all go outside before the floor breaks in. You all set in a circle because I have some good advice for you. Just one thing I want to say before I start learning you. Knothead and Snothead, I want that there field plowed and planted in corn so Maw will have meal for the year."

Paw kept talking, "So Knothead, you met a girl huh?"

Knothead replied, "Yeah, Paw, but I didn't want anyone to know cause her daddy shot at me one time when I was getting close to their house. We know to meet at the spring and gather watercress together."

Paw said, "Knothead, she is not one you would want to take as a wife. You should wait until you are 16 to start looking, and that girl is the same age as you. When you are ready, you need to look for a 13 or 14-year-old where you can train her the way you want her to be."

Paw continued his talk, "I have something to say to you girls also. Lizzy, you are eight years old I think. And you have one eye that is crossed a little. So unless you learn how to cook like Maw, you might be 17 or 18 years old before a man would want you. To you smaller girls, as you know when we kill something big to eat, Maw cooks it all and lets it set on the table until it is gone. If it is not gone, Maw feeds the dogs with it. I want you all to start learning now because girls don't go to school."

Paw went back into the house and set down and began looking out the window again. He lit his pipe. His attention turned quickly to the woods. He asked, "Maw, do you hear a noise down there in the woods?"

Before she could answer, Paw said, "I caught a glimpse of it, and it's big."

Maw grabbed the gun and rushed outside. Then a shot rang out. She comes back in, and Paw said, "Did ya get it?"

Maw said, " I don't know. But I made it turn that man loose it had."

The oldest boy had gone into the Marines and had gathered enough money to buy a car. He had to learn to drive it and was coming home on leave. He was working his way through the woods in the car. He was the main attraction for the next few days telling about how the rest of the world lived, and how he never knew the earth was so big. The oldest continued that they had learnt him how to read purty good, "I could probably read most of the papers that Maw put on the walls."

Paw spoke up and said, "This here paper on the wall next to my chair has blacker words on the top. I have always wondered what it said. Youse think you could read it?"

The boy says that the word that is in heavy black says, "NOTICE." He told that the smaller print says, "Whoever took the slice of cake from the sheriff's office, please return it. It is evidence in a food poison case."

SOMEONE IS ALWAYS TELLING A BIG ONE IN THE OZARKS

A serious situation arose when the state started sending game wardens into Oregon County in the back wood sections. No game warden wanted to go into certain sections of Oregon County, because of the fear that they faced. People thought the wardens were trying to keep them from eating, and many of them endangered themselves if they went into certain areas. They would many times apply for a transfer when they saw what the situation was. They would have small limbs shot off above their heads, coming from nowhere. The last one that I can remember thought he was tough enough to take on anything. But somehow he was shot in the leg and was no longer around. An old time story teller told me stories that I was purty sure was not true. A storyteller sometimes relaxes himself, usually with a whittling knife and a stick he is whittling on Sometimes the longer they talk, the more involved you get into the story, no matter if it is true or not. Sometimes you have to say, "I've got to go at the end of one of

the stories." Because if you didn't, he would just go into another story.

There was something that I never learned how to do that most of the backwoods men were good at. They could put a bit of fish in one side of the mouth, and the bones would be coming out the other side.

When you got with a good storyteller you would not have a chance to talk. You would try to figure out the end of the story.

He started in by saying, "Last year, the fishing was mighty poorly there in Riverton. Only one man was bringin' fish every day and the rest of the men were standing in the store talking about not catching anything. One man would come in with a stringer full of nice fish every day saying he had put the ones he did not want back in."

"The game warden visited this store a lot as he would put his boat in there sometimes. He was there, and the men were complaining and were saying, "Old Red will pull in here in a minute with nice fish, and we can't catch anything. He does it day after day."

The Game Warden became interested and stayed and watched Old Red come in. Sure enough, he had a nice stringer of fish. The Game Warden asked him, "How do you catch fish and these guys don't?"

As Old Red spit out a purty good size of chewings, he said, "You just gotta to know how, boys, you just got to know how."

The Warden asked Old Red if he could go out with him tomorrow. Old Red spit another spit into the dust and said, "Ifn youse can be here at eight o'clock, you can go with me, but I don't wait."

Eight o'clock, Old Red was there and had everything in the boat. The Warden got in the boat and off they went. Old Red went down the river a fer piece and stopped the boat. He reached under the seat. He pulled out and lighted two sticks of dynamite handing one to the Warden. Old Red tossed his towards the bank away from the boat. The Warden was saying, "This is against the law. You can't do this."

Old Red looked at him and said, "Those fuses aren't too long. Are you going to fish or stand there and talk and get us blown up?"

I reckon Fred put the best one over on him though. Fred had come in with his fish, and the Warden wanted to see his fishing permit. Fred did not have

one, so he told the Warden, "I haven't been fishing. These are my pet fish, and I bring them down here to take a swim about every two days. I can let them loose, and they will go out and swim for about ten minutes and come back and I will take them home."

The Warden took off his big hat and scratched his head and said, "I never heard of such thing, I got to see this."

Fred let the fish go one by one and said, "They will be back in ten minutes."

After thirty minutes the Warden said, "Where is the fish?" Fred just looks at him and said, "What fish?".

I stood up and said, "I gotta go."

He said, "You heard what happened on that little lake up on the hill, didn't ya? The one that has crooked roads and a deep valley at the bottom."

I had heard this story, but I wanted to hear how he told it.

"The Warden caught some old boys up there just below that little spillway. They would fix a flat board and tape dynamite to it and get lots of fish until the warden caught them. Would you believe that did not stop those old boys. What they would do is hide their pick-up just above where the spillway was. It was only about 75 yards up the hill from the spillway, but it was more than a quarter of a mile by the road. So ifn they saw him coming, they would run up and high tail it in their pickup.

Well, what I am talking about is that one of the old boys had a dog by the name of "Rattler." Heard he was purty good dog.

Anyhow, they slipped down the hill and had several flat boards with long fuse dynamite taped to them. The long fuse is so the board would float out farther before the dynamite went off. Would you believe the first board went out about ten feet and Old Rattler went in to retrieve it. They knew they better get out fast and so they high tailed it up the hill as fast as they could. They looked around and here comes Old Rattler with the board and dynamite in his mouth coming to catch them at his full speed.

Luckily, the dynamite went off before he got to them. Yep, it shore was a shame, all they found when they went back was a small piece of Old Rattler's collar."

Now this story was told well and was true, because I was nearby when it happened.

Old storytellers are like rubber bands. They will stretch it as far as they can and try to hold you into what they are saying. I left before another spit or story was started. I will say one thing, those old boys in the backwoods of the Ozarks sure could tell some gooderns.

LOOKING BACK DAILY AT MY HOME IN OREGON COUNTY

Sixty years ago as a young man, I went in search for what I thought was a better life. I will tell you up front I did not find that better life. Ok, so I have a better house, I have indoor plumbing and I have a telephone. I have two cars and other things of modern day items.

Even though I come back to Oregon County yearly, I still cannot find the satisfaction of what I left in 1955. One thing my wife can testify to is that Oregon County never left me.

A reminder enters my mind several times a day, when I am working on my place in East Texas. I bring to my mind how it was done in Oregon County.

Two weeks ago, I had an eleven-year-old boy, and his brother come down from the city and spend three days with me. I told him he could go along with me if he would leave his phone and electrical devices at home. I had an idea to teach them that there were more important things in the world than their modern devices.

As we were walking up a lane in the woods, I saw a limb that would make a perfect bow for a bow and arrow for him. I asked, "Would you like to have a bow and arrow?"

His eyes lit up and he said, "Yes."

I showed him the limb and told him why it would make a good bow.

I then asked him, "Is your knife sharp?"

He then looked at me with a puzzled look, before saying, "I don't have a pocket knife."

He continued to tell me several reasons why he could not have one. I

guess that one slipped by me. When I was his age I would have dropped out of school if I couldn't have my knife, or run away from home if my parents did not allow me to have one.

When we got to two ponds that set close together, we sat to rest from our walk. His older brother was setting there fishing, and I could see nothing he was doing right to catch fish. He came over and asked me what he was doing wrong. I told him, "First of all, you have a hook on that line as big as a hay hook."

Then is when the question came, "What is a hay hook?"

It doesn't take much to get me started talking about my childhood. I told him and continued to talk about the house that we lived in, and the toys that my dad and we boys would make to play with. They were so interested that they just stayed close to me, and nothing but the stories seem to matter anything to them.

When we come to the shed they began questioning me again, "What is that stall for?"

I explained how one was a nursery, and the hay feeder which I had to explain how it worked. I also had to explain all about the chicken house and the eggs that they get at the store came from a big building.

I had told them about no electricity and what our meals was called, breakfast, dinner and supper. I told them how after supper the family sat on the front porch where it was cooler, and sometimes played music and sang.

When we had supper that night, I went to the porch to sit in my rocking chair as I do most nights, and they come out and set on the porch with me. After a minute or so they were both looking at me in a deep reading of what they wanted to ask me. They were now calling me Grandpa.

The oldest one spoke first and said, "Grandpa, would you tell us more stories about your childhood; we don't want to watch T.V."

They told me how much they enjoyed the place and wanted to come back as soon as they could and really didn't want to go back home tomorrow. I think the little one was happy that he didn't have to go to the back of the house to wee wee. I told him if he didn't stop using that tree so much he was going to kill it.

THINGS I MISS TODAY ABOUT MY CHILDHOOD DAYS IN OREGON COUNTY

Laying in bed, my thoughts went back to Oregon County as a child. I have a low-grade fever, so if this doesn't make sense to you, it might be because you are younger than I am.

They had the Country Music Awards last night, and It made me sick. Where were all the old real country music songs? Old George Jones hung on as long as he could and put out the most of the old country music singing. The last good one that I know of was, "He stopped loving her today." That just one of the very few songs of the last ages of country and western songs that a person could feel what was being said. You were there when they put the wreath on the door.

When I was a young one in Oregon County, you could identify with, "You picked a bad time to leave me Lucille." That song might have been later, but you could feel what was going on and understand it. Blue Grass was also mixed with country and western music. I can still remember a song that had feelings. It went something like this, "I heard the wreck on the highway, but I didn't hear not anyone pray." It made you say a little prayer. Then some old boy came up with a song that wasn't religious, but it was sang at every funeral. "Precious Memories." It made a person think of all the memories of their friends, and the tears were hard to hold back.

Another song that burns in my memory was a song that my dad would have me get what we called a geetar and play and sing it for company. It made me know someone was there, and I wondered who she might be. The song was called "Young love, First love," by Sonny James. It seems all those songs had sorrow and pickup truck in them.

I have written many of the sorrowful songs and you got to be hurting for them to be good. For example, I have written many songs and had to make myself hurt to do it. Some I have written are called, "Does He Have Some Type Of Magic", "I forgot to tell her", "Rainy Days and Rainbows", "Set Um up Joe", and many more. I stopped writing songs when I became interested in writing stories. Some of the popular bluegrass songs were, "Ruby", "I'm going to lay around this shack till the mail train comes back", and to make this shorter I won't list anymore.

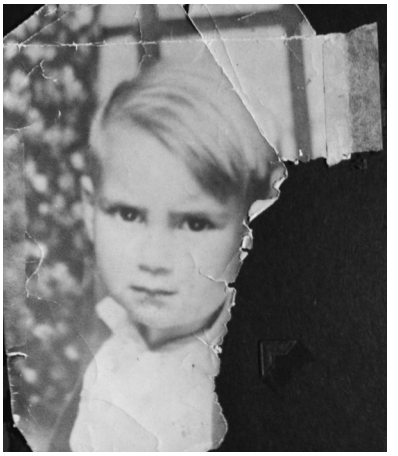
There were also what we called, "Hillbilly Songs." These were songs that some of the old timers back then had fun and liked to dance with. Many of them were good "Clog Hopping" dance songs. Now many of you might not know what

"Clog Hopping" is. It's a pair of thin legs sticking out of the bottom of a pair of bib overhauls, who has put about a pint of white lightning in his stomach and would dance by himself. The floor would be cleared for him, and before he got finished, another one was taking his place, one trying to outdo the other one. "She will be coming around the Mountain," was not a good clog hopping song. But when my brother's fiddle turned loose on ""Cotton Eyed Joe," you would have them cut loose. Usually, we didn't do that until they got a little tanked up.

Boy, I can still hear those nickels and dimes hitting the metal can as we played. "Dance All night, Dance a Little Longer, Pull Off you coat and throw in the corner," was a must at those shindigs.

MY COMFORTABLE BABY BED

I have told stories before about how My mother was a self-survivor from the time she was six years of age. There was never a gentler soul alive, but when she had to be she was tougher than a spike nail. As I have told before that I am four years older than my brother just younger than myself, and I am not for sure he experienced the same baby bed or not. I was born in August and that was a bad time to be born in our family, because of the baby bed you had to spend the days in. Being born August the 20th gave my Mother very little time to toughen me up because cotton picking time was in September. My mother could pick 325 to 350 pounds a day and still could take care of a baby.



Bill Combs

I see on facebook all the time where the young mothers-to-be are picking out colors and a fancy beds for the new baby that is coming into the family. My Mother would not let having another child slow her down much. She might rest a day, and when I say rest, she would just do cooking and housework but no field work. As far as I know my mother breastfed each one of the kids in the family. And we were eating mashed potatoes or mashed up fried potatoes in no time at all.

We would take a gallon jug that was wrapped in a tow sack full of fresh cool spring water to the cotton field. Mom had a 20 foot long cotton bag that held her cotton. (I think they made three sizes, 12 foot long for the little ones, sixteen foot for bigger boys and a 20 foot for adults). For the first 20 lbs. or so she would hold me in her arms. Then she would put me down, and push the cotton to the rear of the cotton bag and make a little ring around the space with more cotton. She would also put a white cloth over it to keep the sun

off me. After this, she might put a wet cloth in by me for me to suck on. She would go back to picking cotton with a glance back every few moments to make sure I was OK. Then she would gather 300 to 350 lbs. of cotton with a break to breastfeed me and see that I had plenty to drink. My older brothers told me this story and the oldest one even claimed he got a thorn in his foot from crawling out of the bed.

Mom would then go to the house with me and put me on a blanket on the floor and cook supper for everyone. I am not sure how many of my brothers experienced this, but I would say most all of them, but some would be older when they were put on the sack. As far as I know it didn't hurt a one of us. If we did get sick Mom was the doctor.

I know some of the stories that I write are hard for some of the younger generation to believe, but a person would find it very hard to make up stories like these. I write them like I remember them being told or doing. Don't get me wrong I love to write about my past.

MY BROTHER CLIFF COULD TELL GOOD WHOPPER STORIES

Back in the forties there was a ballroom called "The Cimmaron Ball Room," where young people would go dancing on Saturday nights. Bob Wills and Johnny Lee Wills played there on the weekends. One of Johnny Lee Wills's band members became my sister's husband in later years. He was an Oklahoma University football player and was put into the hall of fame in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I asked Cliff's wife to write down some of the things she thought when she had seen Oregon County. I wanted to do a story in a book that I was writing and wanted to know her reaction of being a city girl and coming to our farm in Alton. I cannot tell all the story because of its length, but I will give a little of the story from the book.

My wife and I were thinking about some of the things in the book, and this story came up. We had a good time laughing, because it was true and real. She said to me, write some of the stories in "You know you're from Oregon County." I told her I had already written a story today, and I would wait until tomorrow. She said to me, "Write it now, you write better when something is fresh in your mind."

She (Cliff's wife) related to me that she was raised in a home that was strict with a rich family style. When you went to the table, you were to act like you were eating in a fine restaurant. Food was passed right. No fork was raiseduntil everyone had food. You were not to leave the table without being excused.

Here is her story:

In August of 1952, at the ballroom, I danced with a tall (6'3") skinny young man named Cliff Combs. He told me he was just a farm boy from Oregon County, Missouri. He told me there were 11 children born to his mother and father, nine of whom were living. He went on to describe the huge dairy his family owned. He told me about the big orchard that lay behind the farm, and beyond that the beautiful river where he swam and fished as a boy. I refused Cliff when he asked me for a date, but he kept talking. He said it would be fun if you and your cousin would go out with his twin brother, and we could double-date. It intrigued me to date twins, so I accepted. Even though they were about the same size and looked alike, I could tell they were not twins. She asked him why the twin story. He threw his head back and laughed loud and hardy. They were married later, and he brought her to Alton with my older brother and his wife.

From Tulsa, Oklahoma, they arrived at our farm house. It was almost midnight and very dark. Cliff and Glen started pounding the door and whooping and hollering. Lights started coming on in the house. Cliff's mother opened the door and said, "Is that you, Cliff and Glen?"

She was wearing a long, flannel nightgown, and her hair was in a braid that hung way below her waist. She asked, "Is that your new wife, Clifford?"

Cliff replied, "Yes, Mom." Then he introduced me to his Dad, who slept in his long handle underwear. He had slipped on some overalls and had snapped only one strap.

Cliff's Dad said "Another red-head, huh? I never cared much for red hair myself."

Both of these brothers had red-headed wives and they glanced at one another. I was beginning to feel very uncomfortable. The baby of the family, Pat was sitting extremely close to me looking at my face and said, "You got black under your eyes."

I thought my mascara had smeared but that was not it. Pat had never seen makeup like that before. She was asking later how Vertilee, Cliff's wife, cut her eyebrows and where did you get that stuff that she had on her face. Pat was awed by it all.

Pat came in the next morning and Mom asked her what she wanted to eat. Pat said, "Nothing, I didn't sleep good last night, wiggling and squirming."

Then Cliff's new wife asked where the bathroom was. Mom said "Out there in the field, but it's cold out there and you have to climb through the fence. But if you would like to go into my bedroom, there is a white bed pot under the bed. You can use it if you want to."

Cliff's new wife decided the outhouse was the best bet, so she crawled through the fence and closed the door to the outhouse. She started to open the door and come out. We had an old cow called "Old Blue." Every time we had company that would use the outhouse, she would break her neck to get there and lean against the door. She looked through the cracks, and sure enough Old Blue was leaning against the door. She started hollering for someone to come. It was about thirty minutes before Cliff heard her. He walked slowly out and said, "That old cow won't hurt you. Just push her out of the way."

He went out and moved the cow, and his wife was about frozen.

I was 15, and she wanted me to show her around the dairy. I told her all we had was 17 cows that we milked by hand. I walked outside with her. She asked, "Where is the orchard?"

I looked at her and said, "We have an old crab apple tree out there in the field."

Then she said, "Where is the river on the farm?"

Again, I had to look at her and say, "We got a little ditch over there that has a little water in it when it rains. The river is probably 15 or 20 miles down the road over there."

She asked, "What is that pipe up on the poles running from the house to whatever that is out there?"

I explained to her that we didn't have running water. That was pipe that carried the water from the roof of the house to keep the cistern full. I told her "Sometimes we have little wiggly things in the water. Just take your finger and knock them out if the dipper picks some of those up when you needed a drink."

This lady made my brother a lifetime wife and really liked coming to Oregon County. She said it was a good part of the world. She could relax and let her hair down. I guess she meant not have to be so proper.

MY MOTHER ALSO TOLD ME STORIES, MOSTLY ABOUT MY DAD

A man used to make his own beer. My mother was against any kind of alcohol drink. I don't understand how my Dad did this unless Mother was away from home.

My father drank and was a good dice shooter in his younger days. I seem to remember a little of the story that I am about to tell. I don't know what you use to make beer, but my Dad could make it. He was using Mom's pressure cooker on the wood stove making him a batch of beer. Something must have gone wrong. The pressure was so high; it blew off the cooker through the ceiling of the kitchen. It left a big hole above the cooking stove in the ceiling, but I am not for sure if it went through the roof or not. Mom was mad as an old wet hen. She made Dad do some carpenter work without his beer.

Dad also lost his set of dice because Mom caught him trying to teach me how to throw a little number out of the bottom part of your hand and a big number out of the top of your hand. She grabbed the dice and destroyed them.

Back in the early forties, there used to be a dice game going on under the bridge leading out of Alton, towards Riverton on Saturday evenings. My Dad was a kid at heart. He played baseball with a show team that played town teams.

Mom finally used her five-minute rehab on him and after that he never drank or gambled at all. I was too young to witness this, but as I have said, it was Mom's story, and my Dad confirmed it later. He had been playing baseball. He came home setting in the back of a pickup with his teammates who had been drinking. Mom went out to the pickup with a 12" inch piece of stove wood, took him by his bib overalls, dragged him out of the pickup, and hit him between the shoulder blades with it. Her five-minute rehab worked because he never drank again after that. He stopped gambling altogether because he knew a rehab was coming for that.

My Dad smoked a pipe. He stopped smoking that also because he had bought a new pair of overhauls. He thought the pipe was out and stuck the pipe in the upper pocket. After awhile he smelled something burning. The pipe had burned a hole in his new overhauls. He took the pipe out by the woods, threw it as far as he could, and never smoked again.

My dad always took my Mother to church even though he was not involved. One Sunday night my Mother was sick and couldn't to go to church. He said, "I think I will go, if it is okay." That was the night he joined the church.

MOM's ROCK GARDEN

What I am going to write is about young boys and girls that would have unusual habits at night.

First, I want to share with you about myself and walking in my sleep. When I was about 4 or 5 years old, we lived in a big two story house with a big fireplace that set in the middle of the house. The upstairs was just one room, and the heat from the big rock chimney from the fireplace downstairs was the heat for that upstairs room. The farm itself was 360 acres, I believe.

My mother loved pretty rocks and had built a rock garden under the upstairs window on the left side of the house. All the kids slept upstairs. We had bedding on the floor because that was the only use of that room.

I had what we called nightmares. I would walk in my sleep from the time I was about three years of age through high school. When I walked in my sleep, I could almost know what I was doing though I had little control over where I was or what I was doing. One thing I did learn was that when you are asleep, you don't hurt as bad when something goes wrong as you did when you were awake.

This one night I had gotten up and was looking out the window at the rock garden from the second story window. I decided, or something decided that I wanted to go to the rock garden. So I opened the window and jumped out of the second story into the rock garden. The noise woke Mom up. She came running out with her long flannel gown on and woke me up. She asked if I was alright. I didn't even know where I was or what I had done. Mom checked me out and kept asking, "Are you OK?"

She could not find a scratch one on me. I was fine and she sent me back to bed.

Later years after we had moved outside of Alton, I was not so lucky. One warm day I went outside and laid down under the cherry tree in the front yard. I dreamed I was a horse. I started bucking on my knees and hands. My younger brother Truman came out and straddled my back and was riding me like you would a bucking horse. Our front porch had four 4x4 posts across the front of it. I bucked him towards the square post and hit my head directly in the middle. My scalp was laid open flopped over one ear. I laid the scalp back in place. I was getting ready to draw water out of the cistern when my Dad walked up to me and asked, "How much money do you have saved? Your mom don't want to sew you up, so lets go find Dr. Carhart and see if he will sew you up."

I remember telling Dr. Carhart that I only had about $12. He looked at me and smiled and said, "That is enough."

He put 18 stitches in my head and took them out about three weeks or so later.

I played basketball in my sleep and talked to my teammates just as if we were in the game. I was always proud of my shoes, even though they were hand me downs that didn't have all of the soles in bottom of them. I would get up almost every night and polish and shine them. Mom would move them off the kitchen table every morning.

The other thing we had problems with was wetting the bed. When we got up in the morning, we would accuse each other of getting everyone else wet We did not have an indoor bathroom. Mom would kill us if we wet off the porch because she had flower beds around the porch, and it would kill her flowers.

I found out that most farm boys wet the bed longer than city kids did with indoor bathrooms. Some of them also wet the bed up until they were 7 or 8 years old. It was too far to the outhouse out in the field. Mom's flowers were around the porch, and you dare not go around the cherry tree.

THE LOST ART OF TELLING OUR CHILDREN WHAT WENT ON IN THE WORLD WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD

There has been a lot about D-Day on television in the last month or so. D-Day was covered by radio, and we knew what was going on. It happened on June 6, 1944. The landing at Normandy coast with the terrible description of bloody water was made colorful by the radio announcers. Vocal pictures were made of of brave soldiers swimming through the debris of bodies to get to shore. These announcers were great at relaying these scenes to our minds.

I was seven years of age at that time, and my little veins shivered with cold blood thinking that we were going to be a communist country. I was told back in the early days of the possibilities of the Atomic Bomb being built in the dense Wilderness area of Oregon County. That was heavy on the minds of many families that did not want it built in here. Oregon County did not get selected for the site, so it brought some peace to the minds of struggling families. Just as people have worries today about what might happen to our country, they were much worse then.

The farm families of Oregon County were like most other counties, just waiting to see what was going to happen. Fathers instructed the families on what could lie ahead, and that left a deep memory of those days in my mind. Hitler was a very strong man in his tactics, but one of the good things that happened to this country, and Oregon County, was a man by the name of Dwight Eisenhower. My dad named a brother just younger than I am after him. General Douglas MacArthur was also a contributing factor in bringing the U.S. back together again.

Women during this age were called, "Soldiers without guns," because so many men were at war. The women become riveters and welders and other things in defense plants. Roosevelt had been elected president by beating Hoover in 1933, before my time, but for the country to come together, Hoover shook hands with Roosevelt on the parade line. Roosevelt was known for his long cigarette holder and smoking, but no one said anything that I knew of. Hoover did a great thing by going out of his way to congratulate Roosevelt, and there was no bitterness of Republican or Democrat. They were working together to make the U.S. great.

I still have my Dad's watch and rock hammer from working on the WPA. The WPA was a program that I remember well, and it helped the country then and gives us many pleasures today that we would not have if not for it. The radio programs that the family listened to from the big battery radio released some of the pressure for the families.

Hollywood did its part also. Movie stars took time to entertain in what was called "Canteens." Rita Hayworth was one of the famous pin-up girls to GI's. Even to the people back in Oregon County, she helped bring a smile to us by letting her picture in a bathing suit be put on a steering knob.

People like Jack Carson, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Jane Wyman, and others did their part in promoting war bond rallies to help finance the war.

During my childhood, there was no us and them politics. The family shared everything that was going on in the world, even in Oregon County. I am not for sure there are any WPA workers left. I can only remember from about 1940 on.

CHRISTMAS ON THE FARM

First of all, I want to say that we had great Christmases on the farm. You see, we had Christmas about three weeks a year. Let me try and explain.

Most people in the city looked forward to Dec. 25th. Christmas day to enjoy the day. Not us, we had several Santas, and it took him several weeks to deliver our presents. In fact, our Christmas lasted almost three weeks.

As most of you know I had several brothers and sisters who had moved to the city to work, and they would start sending presents in the mail about three weeks before Christmas day. Each day, about ten o'clock in the morning, we would start watching for Santa in his car, marked U.S. Mail. Each day we would watch for the mail car to make the curve at the top of the hill and make its way down into the valley towards our mailbox. If it was a big item, Santa would honk his car horn across the valley. If it was a present of clothing in a big box, he might toss it farther over in the ditch. One of us would be there almost in time to catch it before it hit the cold ground.

We had a rule that you could not open the present until you got to the house, no matter if it had your name on it or not. Clothing was a very popular item with my brothers and sister because we could make all the toys we needed ourselves. Whoever got the present opened it, and all the family admired it. Never did like Mom's comment, "That will sure make a pretty quilt top in a few years."

It didn't matter who got the present; we all enjoyed seeing it opened by whoever received it. That was just one day of Christmas with several more to come. Dad would say, "Youn's pick up that paper and put it in the heating stove. Don't want to catch the house on fire."

We had tomorrow to look forward to, and it would be Christmas again. We did not go to bed with thoughts of sugar plums floating in our heads, but rather who would Santa deliver a present to tomorrow. Nor were we thinking of reindeers on the roof. We were thinking, if it rains, will the roof leak? Neither did we expect Santa to come down the chimney because he couldn't fit through those stove pipes. If he could have, we might have put hooks in the pipes to catch him.

Closer to December 25, the gifts kept coming. We opened every one of them as soon as they arrived. We were already asking Mom, "Are we going to town today? If we are, can I wear my new shirt?"

Oh, what a pleasure it was to strut around the square just knowing everyone was saying, "Look what a pretty shirt that boy has on or those must be brand new jeans that boy has on."

Well, Christmas is not here for most city people, but we were just entering our prime time.

Now it is time to get the crayons out and make a pretty Christmas card for your brothers and sisters. These would go under the Christmas tree when a brother or sister would come home from the city. We had Mom to make glue out of flour and water. We would color paper rings after going to the woods and cutting a little bit bigger in size than mom said we could have to set on the table in the living room. Then the paper rings were placed on the tree. No flashing lights or another plug in to worry about.

Christmas dinner was a special time. Mom's dressing was so juicy and good. It was was stuffed in the hen she had killed. Not only that, a neighbor would usually send a fresh dressed possum or coon for extra meat. Parts of that old hen would be about the only thing left. Mom would tell us not to say anything about that being possum or coon for it might dull their appetite.

After a real feast with Mom's homemade rolls, everyone seemed to get lazy and find a good spot for a Christmas nap.

We never heard of Wal-Mart or Black Friday. It wouldn't have done us much good anyway. And I am glad because we were happy anyway.

Wouldn't it be nice to have one of those long Christmas times today, where a house looks like a place to live?

THE SAD DAY FOR A LITTLE BOY

Have you in your childhood had someone who looked enough like you for people to think you were twins with another person or at least brothers? I have. J.D. Storms may not still be alive, but about ten years ago, my brother visited him in Portland, Oregon. He owned a big horse ranch. J.D. was older than me, and his mother always commented on how much we looked alike. We were the same size; both had curly hair and brown eyes with long eyelashes. As far as I know, we were not related. Mary, his mother, was widowed and lived not too far from our farm in Alton.

The brother that was older than me, and the one I have talked about before, loved to tease me and make me believe things that would scare me. He seemed to do most of this when he would take me squirrel hunting, as I think back on some of the things now.

One afternoon he was sitting under the cherry tree in the front yard cleaning the gun, after the rain we had that morning. I walked up and was watching him clean the gun when he looked at me and said, "I am going hunting, would

you like to go?"

I told him I would, and he said, "Good, I need to talk to you about something."

As soon we got out into the woods, we set down on a big bank that we had set on before and shot squirrels from. Setting there for awhile, I was wondering what he was going to talk to me about, whatever it was. I asked him, and he reached down and got a small stick and was marking or maybe writing something in the dirt.

Then he says, "Well, I have decided I better not tell you."

This did not help. Now I wanted to hear worse than ever, so I kept begging him to tell me. Finally, he looked at me and said, "I hate to tell you what I am going to say because we get along so well. But I will tell you. You are not part of the family; you were adopted."

My mind went blank, and I thought about how much J.D. and I looked alike. But Mr. Storms had been dead several years and I knew Mrs. Storms would not give a child up.

I then asked if he knew where I came from, and he said, "A little town in Arkansas called Skip and Jump, Arkansas" (Not sure if that was the name or not).

When we got home, I stayed close to Mom who was pregnant with my younger brother, and had nothing to say. I just wanted to be close to Mom. That night was a night of a few tears and wanting Mom and Dad to be my Mom and Dad. Next morning, I had decided I was going to talk to Mom about it. I was almost four and sat on her lap and asked her if I had been adopted.

Mom looked at me in shock and said, "Lord no, what give you that idea?"

I told her what my older brother had told me, as he was coming into the house. Mom told him what I had told her, and he started laughing so hard, he was slapping his knee. When he did stand straight up, he got the hardest blow in the stomach that any almost four-year-old could give.

Mom then told him, "That's not funny. You scared that kid to death. The next time you pull another trick like that, you are going to the peach tree and cut off a good size branch. I am going to wear it out on your rear end."

Later as, I grew older I told other boys about it and found out many of them had been through the same thing with an older brother.

HOW BIG IS IT?

It was a beautiful spring day in Oregon County. My older brother that was always trying to get me to cry called me over to where he was setting on the ground. I really didn't think he was up to anything to scare me this time.

He said, "Remember the newspaper we got together to build a kite with a few months ago? We have them all finished except for putting the tail on them. I have slipped enough of Mom's cloth out for the tails. This is a perfect day to put them in the air."

Now I don't know how many of you have made or flown a kite, but the tail has to be the right size for it to fly steady in the air. I was feeling good and lucky at the same time. I had my kite steady in the air before he did. He was still getting the right size on the tail and finally put it up in the air close to mine. We then laid on the grass watching them fly. We not only was watching them fly we were looking at the sky and making up what each cloud looked like.

I was feeling secure and was sure now he wasn't up to something. If he was, what would it be? He couldn't scare me like he could on a huntin trip when we were three miles from home. He would tell me there was a big bear hiding behind the tree about 25 yards ahead of us. They like to eat the younger prey first. No sirree, nothing here he could scare me with.

He was saying things like, "That is a very bad rascal that just passed us in the cloud, but we are alright, it went on by."

Then I made the mistake of asking him, "How high do you think the top of those clouds are?"

That was it. This gave him the opening to tell me a big one, and I swallowed it hook, line and sinker. He rolled over on his side with a serious look on his face and said, "Well, the way I figure it, the top of them might be from a 100 to 200 miles away, and under the ground might be about the same. It would take a lot of dirt to hold up some of those big buildings they have in West Plains and Springfield."

"Do you want to hear the danger part?" he asked which he knew I would.

I think the reason Dad settled here in Oregon County is because he knew Arkansas was purty big on one side of us. The land always runs to a big river at St. Louis, Mo.

He asked, "Have you ever heard of Oklahoma? It has real big buildings in Oklahoma city and Tulsa. Tennessee where we listen to the Grand Old Opry on Saturday night also is quite piece away. One of the far away places you might have heard of has already cracked and filled up with water. They call them oceans."

He went on, "Now, little brother I want to tell you something, that I didn't want to tell you before because I was just hoping you would be lucky. You need to walk carefully and watch in front of yourself. I think we are okay, but you never know when that ground is going to break and fall somewhere."

My kite enjoyment was over. We took a gentle walk to the house and then to that big tree that I climbed. At least I would be higher there. After a while my Dad came out of the house and asked me if I was going to stay up there all day. I explained to him and he told me to come down which I did. He said my older brother was just telling me a windy.

Dad said, "A man could probably walk six months and not fall off the end of the earth."

By this time, I had learn to make a fist with the knuckles out instead of hitting with the side of my fist. I caught my brother standing just right and plowed a fist right into his stomach. His remark was, "You're beginning to learn to use that fist, it hurt."

The rest of the day he treated me nice with the exception of stepping from behind the door saying, "Boo!"

Comments:

What you learned from your brother probably came in handy growing up, you can't always believe everything you heard. I sort of like him for thinking all that up. I had an uncle like that, told me that he came to the Ozarks chasing a Connestoga wagon waiting for the big back wheels to run over the small ones in front. Another time, he said he was out following rabbit trails in the snow and all of sudden the snow melted and he didn't know how to get back home.
Max H. Evans

My Chloe and I still lay on the front deck and make pictures out of clouds... Awe-

some...Memories....Ahhhh, thanks Bill and Max..
Gwen Stites

Awesome. Carolyn Baker

A QUESTION ABOUT RESPECT

This might not have been a thing beyond our family and friends. When I was little, the older people was respected because my dad seen to it, that it would be that way.

We had a certain way we had to move over and almost stop when we were meeting someone coming towards us on the street. If we were in Alton, and one of the old timers was coming towards us, Dad would pull us over close to him and let the elderly by. We would even stop until they got passed us on an eight foot wide sidewalk. Dad would tip his old gray hat at them when they passed by. The older person would smile and nod his head as he passed by.

One thing was not allowed. That was you could not call a man or woman by their first name without something in front of it, like Mr. or Mrs. There was one exception to that which we used. Mom's family was distant, but we called them uncles and aunts.

For instance, the Grooms family was related to Mom and we called them Uncle Sam and her Aunt Mildred. The Frey family the same way, we called him Uncle Lemon and her Aunt Martha. The Hays family we called Uncle Menn and his wife Aunt Anne. Mom was related to the wives of these families, but they were not our Uncles and Aunts. We could get by using the first name if we had uncle or aunt in front of it.

A little boy came to our house one time. We had a hillside that had a lot of wild flowers on it. The little boy said to my mother, "Aunt Mandy, when I grow up I want to buy a farm and have the wild flowers like that."

Was this something that was normal in the olden days or was it just a few families that called people Uncle and Aunt? As I said, some of the families I mentioned, Mom was related too, but it was like second cousins, maybe.

I guess if riding in the back of a pickup was against the law in the early days, Dad would have had a bushel of tickets.

I HAVE NEVER LOST THE HABIT OF EATING BREAKFAST, DINNER AND SUPPER.

A day eating on the Combs farm went like this:

We ate breakfast in the mornings and usually had a bowl of oatmeal before we could touch the biscuits and gravy, eggs and fried tators. Mom got dishes in oats, and it was a demand that you ate your cereal first.

Dad would eat freely on biscuits, butter and black strap molasses. After breakfast, Mom would then take the leftovers of gravy and whatever else to feed the dogs.

Twelve noon would be time to eat dinner. At this meal, Mom would make much more than we could eat, and the leftovers were eaten for supper at about six in the evening. The supper meal would be cornbread in milk (I am trying not to call it sweet milk as we did then) with all the leftovers from dinner.

The sun and the moon were the determining factors on when it was time to get up and time to go to bed. When the sun had put light on the earth, you should be up. When the moon causes darkness on the ground, it would be time to go to bed.

I SCREAM FOR ICE CREAM

That is what us kids would be going around in a circle singing as dad brought the tub and the old wooden crank ice cream freezer up on the front porch. He had been to town and picked up a 15 cent block of ice that he had in a toesack. Mom knew we were going to have a freezer of ice cream, so she had ready the cream, vanilla and whatever else she put into it. It took at least three toesacks to cover the ice that went into the wooden freezer. Then it was covered with ice cream and salt. Then it was ready to turn. We had strawberries that would have tasted good in it, but Dad liked his ice cream plain. When it comes to food, Dad's way was the only way.

One kid would push down on the cold, wet toe sacks on top while a younger one would take his turns turning the crank. Before long another of us

young boys would say, "It's my time to turn the crank." The more the ice cream froze; the harder the crank was to turn. We younger ones would always say, "I believe its startin' to freeze."

The old wooden freezer had a hole near the bottom where the salty water of the melted ice would come out. Dad would check from time to time and put more ice in and cover the ice with the salt. Then the cranking would start again. At this point, it took one of the older boys to turn the crank. At a certain point, Mom would come out of the house with her arm full of bowls and spoons, giving each one of us kids a bowl and spoon in our hands.

After Dad checked the crank several times saying, "Keep turning," we would hear him say, "It's done."

Now came our instructions from my Dad, "You all stay back until I take the toesacks off."

He raised the can that turned in the ice a little so we would not get salt water in the ice cream. Mom would then take the wooden thing that turned in the ice cream out and would take the ice cream off it with her fingers. She would take a lick off her finger and say, "That's a purty good batch we got here. So you all enjoy it, but don't push hard with your spoon getting it out, or it will have salt water in it."

Mom would fill the younger kids bowls up first. The older kids put as much as you could put into a bowl by filling it themselves.

Boy, that was some good ice cream. But something happened to me. All at once, from nowhere, my head felt like it was going to blow off. It hurt in a way I can't describe. I told my mom I was dying.

She said, "Go out there and roll in the grass, and it will go away in a few minutes."

She was right and one of the better doctors around. It happened to some of the others and they did the same thing and it was gone. She then explained that you couldn't eat ice cream like a hawg. You had to take small bites and eat it slow. I was going to do that even though it meant I might not get a second bowl. But that second bowl wasn't worth the pain you had to go through by eating big bites fast.

After it was over, Dad asked one of the older brothers to go get the five gallon coal oil can that was empty. They poured the ice and salty water in it.

He showed my brother the side fence line that had weeds in the wire. He told him to walk along the fence pouring the salty ice water out along the bottom of the wire. At the end of that fence was a gate to the outside. He wanted all the ground in front of the outhouse sprinkled. It would keep that ground in front of the outhouse clean for about a year.

Now, let me tell you about another ice cream that we ate during the winter time starting after the first snow. We called it snow ice cream. Now I ain't sure what Mom put in it, but it was good. It took a lot of snow that she put in a big pan. I think she put two eggs, vanilla, sugar, and I don't know what else in it.

We kids would go out and fill big pans with snow. We would bring them in the house. Mom would dump the snow in and keep stirring. Soon it would start to turn into ice cream.

We were warned not to get snow from the areas where we seen yellow snow, because she said, "That"s where the dogs have used the bathroom."

This was our winter ice cream, and it was as good as the homemade, but would still hurt your head and sometimes put a knot under your arm.

I could give some good advice on eating homemade ice cream, but it wouldn't do any good cause people nowadays go to the store and buy their Blue Bell.

WHY DON'T WE PLAN ON GOING OUT TO EAT TOMORROW?

If a husband or wife said this in today's world, it would not mean much. They would be going to a nice diner and ordering what they wanted to eat and drink. It would not be any big deal atall.

If my Dad said that when I was a small boy, I would know exactly what I needed to do to prepare for eating out. First of all, I would need to find some string to put on a long fishing pole that would be cut at the river. Sometimes we would have real fishing hooks and other times they had to be made with needles and pins.

Mom's big wash tub would have to be set out front where we could load it on the wagon. Dad's minnow jug had to be took out of the smoke house, and a few crackers put with it. His minnow jar was a gallon glass jar with a funnel made out of screen wire tied to the lid with the funnel part sticking inside where the minnows could swim in, but could not swim out.

Several five pound coffee cans had to be put where we would load the wagon. Mom would have a big box that had an iron skillet, a quart jar of grease, and a mixture of flour and corn meal with a little salt. Also we would take aluminum plates to eat off of.

Even though Frederick River was in walking distance (about 1/4 of a mile) from our farm house at Jobe, the wagon would be pulled out of the pond where it stayed immersed in order to keep the wooden wheels from shrinking and the iron rims from falling off.

The wagon would be hooked up and loaded. We kids usually didn't ride in the wagon, we ran ahead or along beside it. Just before we got to the low water crossing, everyone would grab a five pound coffee can and start raking back the leaves to pick up earthworms and dirt.

Dad would unhook the horses with the wagon moving off the road in case someone did come by, but usually there would nobody come by. The reins on the horses would be long enough for them to feed on grass.

We all had things to do before we could fish. Dad would set his minnow trap with crackers just below the concrete on the low water crossing with the funnel end downstream. We kids would cut about 18 inch long sticks with a limb near the bottom and the bark scraped off. This stick was to run through the fish gill out through the mouth and stuck in the bottom of the water where the fish would stay alive longer. We also needed a forked stick that would hold a long cane up when we wasn't holding it.

There were several cane plants that we could pick our pole from. Dad would cut our poles and sometimes there would be good poles that someone else had left after using them. We liked poles that would bend well on the end when we got a fish snagged.

After we got our string and hook tied on, each one of us would find a drift. A drift was where the water was not in the current and small sticks and vegetation grew. That was the best place to ketch the big hand size sun perch that us boys liked. Sometimes this would cause a push and shove fight when one boy was ketchin fish, and another moved in too close to his fishing spot. We just used the worms, and dad would usually fish with the trapped minnows for channel catfish.

The wagon would be positioned by hand under a big shady area. That was the table where we went out to eat. Will Gum always had a big field of corn and we would pick a dozen or so ears at the edge of the road.

The big wash tub would be filled with water. We could bring the fish in and put in the wash tub when we got five or six on the wood stringer that held them.

Dad and Mom would build a fire, and Mom would get the grease hot. The big iron skillet would hold four or five at a time. Mom had prepared our fish biscuits. Fish biscuits were doughy on the inside and had a light brown crust on top and bottom. If you got a fish bone hung in your throat, you would take a big bite of the doughy biscuit to knock the bone out. Mom would usually throw about a dozen taters in the wagon to fry, with a few tomaters from the garden. Mom would have two paper bags. The big one we called a "poke" and the little one we call a bag. The little one was to shake the fish in the flour and meal. The big one was to put the fish in after they were fried.

We all had collapsible cup that we carried in our back pockets, and Dad would only let us drink where the water ran over the concrete at the low water crossing.

After we had eaten that good meal, Dad would take the big tub and always come up with a couple or three big soft shell turtles that he put in water in the tub to take home. When mom fixed these turtles at home, I had to get out of the house. When they were put in a big pot of boiling water, you could hear them scratch the sides trying to get out.

Now, you have heard how this Oregon County farm family went out to eat.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THOSE DIFFERENT KINDS OF GRAVY?

A little before dark, Mom would get her chance to come and set on the porch where it was cool with the rest of us. As the light of day began to vanish, Dad would lean back in his chair, and with a yawn say, "Well it's starting to get dark, it's bed time."

That's when Mom would ask a question, "What kind of gravy do you want for breakfast in the morning?"

Now she wasn't asking what people would think today, white or brown? No sirree, people in the olden days had several different types of gravy to choose from. Let me share two or three with you. I am not talking about what people call giblet gravy at Thanksgiving. We didn't even think of that as a gravy; it was like more of a sauce that you put over a poorly cooked turkey.

We would normally have just the regular white gravy. But regardless what kind of gravy it was, unless a person kept stirring it; it would come out lumpy and not hardly fit'n to eat. We sometimes just said, "Sawmill" gravy that was a little more gritty than white flour gravy, because it was made with white corn-meal.

SAWMILL GRAVY

My Dad was a man when asked a question about anything, he would rare back in his chair and say, "Well that's a long story," before he would give an answer.

Sawmill gravy was started in the logging camps and big sawmills. It was called that also during the Civil War. The reason it was called, "sawmill gravy" is because when the gravy would be coarse and thick, the sawmill workers would accuse the cooks of substituting sawdust for corn meal.

We had a smokehouse and the meat would be salted down and hung on hooks from the ceiling. Mom would wash the meat several times before fixing it, but it still would be salty. This type pork is what we called salt pork and fried it just as people fry bacon today. It would leave a lot of grease in the skillet, and this is what Mom made gravy from. When Mom made "Sawmill gravy," she would put white cornmeal in the skillet of hot grease and add milk and keep stirring it good so it would not be lumpy. Sawmill gravy was often referred to as what the poor people eat.

RED EYE GRAVY

You might have to be from Oregon County and living a poor farm life to know how to eat this gravy. To us it was a sopping gravy. What I mean by this is, you would have one of those gold colored Mother's Oat small bowls and put the Red eye gravy in it. Then take one of Mom's big buttermilk biscuits and stick a little of it down in the Red Eye and eat the part that was soaked. If you poured it over the biscuit it wouldn't taste as good. Dad could do this well because he would pour his hot coffee in a saucer and blow over it to cool it. Then he would sop a biscuit in it from time to time. We didn't get to drink coffee as kids because that was an adult drink. The color of the gravy would be reddish.

Don't use what I am saying as a recipe, because even though Mom had a big wooden box that she kept recipes in, she never used them. She just went by what she thought would taste good.

WATER GRAVY: DAD'S RECIPE

Mom would not make this gravy. It was only for Dad to make if she was off delivering a baby or something.

He put a lot of grease in a skillet, a cup of flour, and water. He would boil and stir the mixture. I never had too many bad days in my childhood, but Dad's water gravy could do it. It was awful. As far as I know this is one gravy that our two hungry dogs would turn their noses up and walk off without even tasting it. We were real unhappy boys and dogs when Mom wasn't home to fix breakfast.

HAVE YOU EVER EATEN WEVILS?

Back in the olden days, farm houses and maybe some city houses, had a kitchen setup different than what you would see today. The kitchen cabinets were set up with a big metal box that would hold about fifty pounds of flour. Mom bought fifty pound bags because the flour come in different prints, and the mothers would make dresses and shirts out of them.

The big metal box was called a flour bin. The flour bin was part of the cabinet, with the dishes on the other side of the bin. It had a cone shape at the bottom of it that stuck down below the cabinet itself. On the cone was a crank, and when the women needed flour they would just stick a bowl under the cone and turn the little crank until they got the amount that they wanted.

In those early days of my life flour most always had what we called weevils in it, even before you brought it home from the store. Now, if weevils would kill you, many of us old timers would be dead a long time ago. If Mom seen one that was near the top or edge of the board, she would just rake it off with a butcher knife. Mom made a lot of bread, pies, and other things from flour. If the President would come to our house and eat some of Mom's bread, she would have been cooking in the White House. If the secret service looked in the flour bin, she would have been fired.

Mom made all her pie crust, because in those days you could not go to the store and find a pie crust like you can today. If she baked an apple pie it was an apple pie, not some filling that you would buy today.

I had just took a big bite of cherry pie and asked Dad, "What do weevils taste like?"

He answered full of action, "Does that pie taste bad to you?" as he was reaching for my plate that had the rest of the piece of cherry pie on it.

My answer was also filled with action, as I grabbed my plate to keep him from getting it, "No Dad, it is real good."

He said, "Don't ask what something tastes like with your mouth full of it."

I could not tell you to this day what a weevil tastes like, but as a little boy in the Ozarks, I jest figured that Pillsbury put them in there to make it better. I guess Mom's old wood cooking stove took care of them and they would be dead anyhows.

Yep, ifn you wanted a glass or somethin else, you would have to go by that flour bin with the weevils in it. Ifn I remember right, I think that it cranked the flour through a wire screen. I never saw Mom clean the weevils out of it. I was in the kitchen with her a lot as a little boy. I did not want to miss the chance of licking the egg beater or that big wooden spoon when she made those good cakes that had weevils in the flour. Put that weevil flour in a good cook's hand, and they tasted wonderful, I guess. I never figured out what weevils tasted like. All I know is that they made good bread, pies, and other things.

Yep, I can jest see my Mom in my mind with that big rolling pin, rolling out dough to make biscuits with, sprinkling that weevil flour on the big board.

LOVED HICKORY CHICKS, POKE SALAD, AND CORN BREAD

When I was a kid we would take a washtub, and if enough wanted to go, maybe two wash tubs. If we took two tubs, we would go down the fence line hunting poke salad. One thing I did notice when we were gathering poke salad was that it had to be washed good. The dogs loved to pee on it and they would beat us there sometimes.

The other tub would be for a large mushroom about the size of a large toad stool that grew around dead logs. It would have a brownish color on the top and was called hickory chicks.

When we got home with the tubs of poke salad and hickory chicks, Mom would start boiling the poke salad to take the strong taste out of it. Most of the time it had to be boiled about three times. It was real good eat'n with a couple pans of cornbread.

The hickory chicks set in a tub of salt water overnight to take any poison out of it, if there was any in them. Mom sliced it up in thick slices, rolled the slices in eggs, coated it with flour, and fried it. The Poke Salad, after she got the strong taste out of it, would be prepared with bacon bits.

I do not know the real name for Hickory Chicks, that is just what we called them. Those Hickory Chicks would replace meat at our house many times. No, none of us got sick or poisoned.

SWEET TATERS AND POSSUM

As a small kid in Oregon County, a lot of taters were eaten. The only taters that was baked in the skin was the sweet tater. Our Irish taters were fried in deep grease in a big iron skillet with an iron lid on top. If Dad rushed out and said, "Hook up the double shovel plow," it meant that we were going to be in the Irish tater place. Dad would handle the plow because he didn't want them cut by the blade. He knew how to do it better than us boys did. The taters would be plowed up in a hurry because the weather had already got hot and K.W.T.O. (Keep Watching The Ozarks) had told him it was going to rain in Oregon County. If the ground got wet when it was hot, it would scald the taters in the ground and they would not be any good. Dad would plow them up, and us boys would carefully put them in what we called the water bucket. Mom was in the smoke-house sweeping and putting down a layer of lime. Mom would gently put the taters on the floor with the lime. They had to be scattered where there was no weight on them, or they would rot. After putting them down, she would spread another light layer of lime on them.

We worked hard to get those taters in before the rains got them in the hot weather. We did not go to the grocery store and buy taters. Mom went to the smoke house, filled her apron full, and fried em up. We would have enough taters to last through the winter. Some of them might rot some, but Mom would just cut the rotten part off and fry the rest of it.

We didn't grow too many sweet taters but would have enough for special occasions, like when we had a good possum. Mom would bake them and load them up good with fresh butter. I declare, you could never have a better meal. But the Irish tater was eat almost every meal.

Now we had kin that grew a lot of sweet taters. They would take the racks off their wagon and make it almost a flat bed. We helped them some, but it wasn't with the taters. You could stick sweet taters in the middle of a wagon and it would not hurt them. They would go into Alton and park the wagon some-where around the square and sell them.

Now you have wasted your time taking a load of sweet taters in, unless you knew how to sell them. That's what we would help with. Most of the sweet taters would be stacked in the middle to the wagon. Around the side of the wagon, you had to have ten or twelve possums nailed by the tail hanging down from the side.

The city people that bought the sweet taters and possum didn't want to be seen carrying a possum, so you had to put it in a bag, or wrap it. Most of the time they would want you to take it to their cars and make sure no one seen you put the possum in it.

Yes, city people were a good market for possum and sweet taters ifn you could get it in their cars without anyone seeing you put it in. They really enjoyed the great meal of sweet Taters and possum, but maybe they were a little ashamed of it.

Mom could sure fix a good batch of mashed taters, with an old chicken that had stopped laying eggs.

OREGON COUNTY BOLOGNA

Back in the early forties, if you bought bologna, it would be delivered to the stores in about a three foot long stick. Then the store would either sell it by the stick, or you could buy it sliced in a small package of different sizes.

One time I can remember when I was about five years old, and Dad had bought a stick of bologna. We heard the word from the courthouse square, "Load up boys, time to go home and milk."

Dad would usually have the feed near the back of the pickup so it would not be hard to unload. We boys sometimes would have our disagreements on where we wanted to set in the back of the pickup. We were loaded and on the way out of Alton when my older brother spotted a three foot stick of bologna sticking up out of one of the boxes of groceries. My older brother took his knife and made a little cut in the top of the stick and made the comment, "Mom won't notice this".

He took a little out of the top where a small cut was made. My other older brother said, "I am going to take a pinch."

Everyone took a pinch. One would say, "You got more than I did," and take another chunk. It would go right on around by age.

Before we knew it, my older brother said, "We are already in trouble. Might as well take another piece."

When we started down the big hill that led to our lane, we had eaten about six inches and the outer skin was showing it. My Mother was first out of the pickup cab. She looked at the box and said to my Dad, "Want you come here and look."

My dad took one look and said, "I declare those boys would eat the green paint off the pickup if'n it wasn't on there so tight."

We thought sure we would get a whipping or maybe even a whooping, but Mom said, " Better get some bread on."

We did not buy store bought bread that we called "light bread." The only time we ever got that is when one of the older kids came for a visit. I loved rolling it up in a ball and eating it.

By the way, if you didn't understand punishment, a whooping was with Dad's double strap razor sharpener. A whipping was with a limb off the peach tree. A paddling was one of those paddles that you could buy for ten cents that had a ball tied to a rubber band. Dad would just take the ball and band off and use the paddle for paddling. Then we had spankings, which was where you bent over your father's lap, and he hit your rear end with his open hand.

I have told something different than what I had in mind, so let me get to the point. When I went to work for Garrett's, we had no meat slicer, so we cut up the bologna with butcher knives. Levi worked all of the Combs boys starting about the 8th grade until we finished school. I might have been one of the worse bologna slicers of all of us. I could start at the top of the stick at one size, and the bottom of the slice would always be thinner or thicker. We would slice the bologna and wrap it in white paper after it was weighed, and a price was marked on the package. We had several 30 to 40 cent packages, and you could get a lot of bologna for 60 to 80 cents.

There were no labels telling about the fat content or any of those other things back then.

THE LADY WITH THE FIVE POUND BOX OF CHEESE

Now there was one thing we never thought of and that was being poor. We might not have had nutn but we still was not poor. There were things we

didn't like to be called. Some of those fellows would go off to St. Louis and after a while would come back driving a shiny big car and call the farmers, "Clod busters." When this happened, they become disliked by all the farmers.

Anyways, getting back to the story of the lady that had five pound boxes of cheese. We spotted the car coming up the lane to the house. Her car had a little more dust on it than most cars, like she had been driving the back roads .We jest happened to think, Old Red the rooster was on the porch and he would spur a stranger. He was sitting where he wasn't supposed to be, on the back of Dad's rocking chair on the porch. Dad would not have liked that atall.

Would ya let me go back on this story a few years? Thank ya.
About 1945 or so, my dad started drinking out of the water bucket with a different dipper than the rest of us. I noticed from time to time he would cough up blood. He was struggling at everything he did. I guess that is why I had less brothers and sisters. We knew about the TB he had, but didn't know anything about his lung cancer. Every time a boy left home, the oldest one became, "Cock of the roost." That meant when Dad was unable to be around, the oldest was the boss and had to follow Dad's directions about the work to be done when Dad was unable to be there. Dad grew weaker and weaker as the months went by. He was only able to go out and point out what needed to be done.

We were eating fine and did not consider ourselves poor. As Dad would say it, "We'll keep the ball rolling every day." So to be blunt with you, we didn't know what poor was. We all had play, work, and Sunday go to meeting clothes. When I am talking about clothes, we had two shirts, two pair of socks with holes in the heels, and two nice homemade shirts. We had one pair of hand me down shoes with air holes in the front sole of them to let out any smell that might get out. Sometimes we might get careless and dirty up both pair and have to go to bed while mom washed them.

I never in my life met a nicer woman than the one with the clipboard that come to the house, with a small box in her hand. Mom took the box and opened it seeing the block of cheese. She told the lady she had some real good pickles in the cellar ifn you would like a jar of them. She declined. Mom gave one of the boys the cheese and at the kitchen table, the pinching off bites started. We made a purty good mess out of that big block of cheese.

She asked Dad about the name on the pickup. Dad told her it was his oldest son's truck and he had left it there for him to use. Dad continued to say, "It's a nice truck. I couldn't handle one of those with the crank on front of it. It broke too many people's arms."

She asked to go in the house. Dad told her that it was hot because the wind is not blowing from the right direction, but she wanted to go in anyhow. Dad looked over at my older brother and whispered, "She is gonna try and buy this place off of us."

She walked through the house and when she got to the kitchen, she noticed that us boys had already eatn two pounds or more of that cheese. We told her how good it was. The nice lady walks back out to the porch and laid her clipboard down. She walked to her car and brought back another five pound box of cheese. Mom told her if she had about fifteen minutes she would go up there on the fence line and pick her some fresh poke salad. Again, the lady declined. The instruction to mom was that she could not give it away or sell it, and you will be getting these and other things on a regular basis.

The lady was so nice even though I had to face her all the time because I had a big hole in the seat of my overhauls. She then started talking to my Dad, "You're sick, aren't you?"

My dad was not one to talk about his health problems, but he answered, "A little bit maybe, I think I have TB and maybe a little cancer of the belly."

Then she asked, "Would you consider me sending you to Mt. Vernon for a few days?" His answer was, "That's a long way. I think it is on the other side of Springfield. Mam and I have been married all our lives and we have never spent a night apart, but I guess there is a first for everything."

The nice lady says, "The state will send you a little check each month to help you with the kids and family."

Mom was strict with the cheese because when one of the kids came home they would want to take some back with them because it was so good. Mom would say, "Eat all you want here, but I can't give any away or sell it.

That was one of the nicer ladies I ever met, just wish I hadn't had that big hole in the seat of my pants so I could have gotten closer to her.

Comments:
GREAT STORY BILL. THANK YOU FOR SHARING. I REMEMBER GETTING THAT CHEESE TOO. Linda Caldwell Trube

I remember getting farmers commodities... Cheese and such... Donald Pingleton

I remember my Grandma getting that big chunk of cheese. She didn't know how

she would eat it all, but she sure enjoyed it.
Jenny Underwood

That was some of the best cheese I have ever eaten...Thanks again, Bill..
Gwen Stites

Bill, we were poor too, but we never knew it until we were grown. I never felt poor. Norma Shirk

Those five pound boxes of cheese were the best tast'n cheese!
Clifton Jewell

I loved that cheese! I'm 55 yr old and my husband and I would get it when our boys were young. We couldn't eat it all before it would grow mold so we froze it. When we would thaw it out. It would just crumble. Still tasted yummy.
Laura Price Luther

Well, I guess I grew up before they had anything like that. I think my family was too proud to take anything anyway. Sometimes when some of our kinfolks came to visit, they would bring us a box of stuff.
Claude Judd

It was the best cheese ever.
Brenda Bennett

MIGHT AS WELL BE HONEST WITH YOU, WHAT DID YOU EAT TODAY?

As a little boy in Oregon County, I knew what was going on but would never tell anyone.

Many people I have heard hated to say, "We eat possum." But why? I knew what the animals on our little farm did. My Grandpa Bunk spoiled most of them by getting up an hour before daylight, going out by the barn, and started hollering. The cows would come in; the old hogs that stunk to high heaven would be there also. The old rooster had been cheated out of his job of crowing, waking everyone up each morning. The chickens would gather around and watch the young rooster fight his Dad for control.

Did you eat a big piece of ham or some sausage this morn? Well I shouldn't tell this, but I was there and I know what their main diet was and how they lived. They eat slop and wollered in the mud all day to keep themselves happy. They eat left overs and whatever else could be found to boil the water into slop. They smelled so bad that the hair would be thin on their backs.

What did you have for breakfast this morning? Now I can tell you this, that the chickens and roosters were about the nastiest thing around.They would eat their own waste. And those were the ones that were picked to eat most of the time.

They would scratch in the dirt and eat worms, grasshoppers, or anything else they could find. They would also recycle their body waste. They were mean at times and chased little kids. They would make another rooster die a slow death by fighting them around the neck area, so there was nothing there except red skin.

What did you have for dinner at noon today? Now, The farm milk cow ain't meant to be eat. They were put here to furnish good fresh milk. The good steer grain fed and kept in pens is a good eatin cow. I can remember when a farmer sold a milk cow, he would stop at Wrights Service Station to borrow his hose. He would stick it in her behind to make her look real fat just before getting to the sale barn with her.

The old milk cows was useful in another way. When we played softball, they made a perfect base. But you had to make sure they wouldn't still ripe. Ripe is when they hadn't dried out real good and no one would want to slide into that.

I am not saying that cows are nasty, just the milk cows. After Grandpa "Bunk" had died, it didn't take long for that old mean rooster to start doing his job again. The sound still stands out in my ears, "Sook hefer sook, sook, sook, sook" and then it would be repeated. For the hogs it would be, "Here piggy, here piggy here and then a big sooey," and this would be repeated several times.

For the chickens he would say, "Come on chick, chick, chick," several times. The old rooster might go ahead and crow after he got there.

Now since I have grown up, I am not for sure what a possum eats, maybe just like the other animals, anything he can find. I would not enjoy one, but if I had my choice of possum or chicken, rated on cleanliness, I am not for sure it wouldn't be possum.

Aw, fry me a good rabbit or squirrel, and I won't worry about it.

I'LL NEVER DO THAT AGAIN.

One hot Sunday afternoon three of my friends came over on horseback. I caught one of our horses, and we had a couple of races. I did not have a good

running horse and would usually come in last. We did not have saddles and so we rode bareback. The horses were getting hot and so were we. We figured out the best place to get cool was in the fruit cellar. We rode the horses to the pond, let them drink, and then tied them up outside the cellar. We went down in the cellar and started talking about outlaws. They would tie the horse up and set kinda in a circle out in the woods, having drinks and smoking.

As we set there, one of the boys pointed out jars of grape juice that had a white layer of something on it. He suggested that we take a couple of quarts with us out in the woods and play like we were outlaws. Most of the boys carried collapsible drinking cups at that time because nothing was better than a good drink from an outside spring. We found the perfect spot and built a little fire just for show. We took the white stuff off of the grape juice.

We noticed that plenty of grapevines were there and decided we would all cut one and smoke it, like the outlaw did. We all lit up and decided it would be more exciting to pass the quart jar around, like the outaws did it. The jars did not go around very many times until we felt a little unstable and realized it had made us drunk. The grape vines had us green behind the ears. Yes, we were not only drunk, we were sick from smoking those grape vines.

I was in trouble. It was going to be time to go to church before long and I could not let my mother see me this way. The suggestion was that we ride the horses over to the big pond and go swimming and wet the horses down to cool them off.

When it was time to go home, I was acting as normal as I could but I was really sick, and the next morning wasn't too much better. I could see Mom look at me from time to time, but she didn't ask me any questions. I suffered through the church service.

The bad thing was that I had done it. The good thing was that I never ever wanted to drink beer or anything else to this day.

Only boys from Oregon County could get themselves in this situation.

AINTY OVER

This is a little amount of the section of the book I wrote, to leave for my children to remember how times were in the past. The words might seem to be spelled wrong, and they are, but this is the way we talked as small children on our farm just outside of Alton, in Oregon County. Before I start I would like for you to know, we made all the toys we played with and had no store bought toys.

It was a hot day in July, and all of us boys were restless. One of the younger brothers walked up with a new ball that he had made.

He had saved enough string from Mom's flour sacks and Dad's feed bags to put together a nice looking ball. Mom had sewed it for him, I'm purty sure. Dad's worn out work socks with a white toe and heel was the outside cover. He walked up proudly with it in his hand saying, "Feel of er, purty good job, huh?"

As he handed it to another brother to look at, we all looked at it. The brother asked, "Whose been helping youse? Youse can't make something like that Yourself. You're lying, ain't you?"

"No," he replied. "I betcha this can be thrown a lot further than any old ball that youse have ever made."

Giving the ball back, my brother said, "I betcha you can't even throw it over the house."

"I betcha I can, but the rusty roof would get it dirty. See that rock there? It's about the same and I betcha you can't even throw it over the house," my younger brother challenged. He was purty young to take the challenge, but he was determined.

"If you can throw that thar rock over the house, then we will let you throw the ball in a game of ainty over," my older brother answered.

What a thrill it was to be big enough to be a thrower in the game of ainty over. My younger brother got set to throw the rock over the house with determination in his eyes. He threw it and it did not make it over before it hit the roof. But it did have enough force in it to go on over and roll down the other side. Every one of us was happy that there was another one that could throw over the house.

Dad heard the rock hit the rusty galvanized roof and was out on the front porch looking at us with his voice that would put the fear in us all. "Who did that?"

None of us moved or said anything.

He then says, "I have told youse boys that when something hits this old roof, it will loosen up all the nails and this old roof with start leaking. Would ya like to eat and sleep in the rain? That's whatcha gonna get if you throw whatever

that was over again. If youns want to play ainty over, use that ball. It's not like a rock."

Then the younger one told us, he had put a rock in it. The rules for the game were simple. Half of the kids were on one side of the house and half on the other side. If whoever threw the ball did not get the ball over, whoever caught it when it came back down off the roof got to throw it. As soon as you could see the ball was going over the house, you would holler, "Ainty Over!"

The ball had to be caught on the other side of the house, and if it was, they would holler back "Caught!" Whoever caught the ball would try to hit someone on the other side of the house with it before they could get to the other side. The side that caught the ball would come around the front of the house and part on the back side of the house. You would not know who had the ball. If you were hit with the ball, you had to be on the side that hit you, and the game would continue until one side was eliminated.

Also, on the left side of the house was the pipes about five foot off the ground that carried water from the roof to the cistern. If you knocked one of those down going around the front of the house, you not only were eliminated, but also were spanked. If you took the back of the house route, there would be more danger. Mom's clothes lines would stop you if you were not careful.

The back of the house only was about twenty feet from the back door to the high garden fence. The ground did not have much grass back there, because that's where table scraps were thrown out the back door for the dogs to eat. It sometimes would be slick, and that high garden fence could be mean to you. If it didn't get you, the clotheslines would.

We played ainty over just before dark and bedtime, most of the time. This may sound like a sissy game, but most of the time you would see bloody noses from collisions.

I once read somewhere about a woman was walking down a country road. A peddler was walking in the opposite direction. He asked the woman, "Are all those kids your's or are you on a picnic?"

I can just see Mom answering this way, "Yes, they are all mine, and it is no picnic."

Only a person from Oregon County would be brave enough to tell this story.

A PENNY WAS WORTH SOMETHING WHEN I WAS A KID IN OREGON COUNTY.

This week a lady contacted me. She was a little girl that was the child on the neighboring farm of ours when we lived in Jobe. Even though we were about five years of age, I can remember her and what she looked like at the time. I was almost a year older than her, and she had shoulder length hair and bangs, and was very bashful until it came to making a penny.

Miles and Beulah had the gathering place for people to visit on Saturday afternoons. They had something for all ages. The men would have a horseshoe pitching contest, and the winners got a big orange soda water. Carolyn would come, and she was about 4 or 5 at the time, and the men would get a penny and give to her if she would sing them a song or two. She could take the penny into the store and buy enough candy that all of us could have some licks off of.

The parents always trained their kids. They wanted a girl to grow into a nice young lady. The boys were taught to be tough and hold our own in any situation.The parents would always be involved in anything that the child would do. Other people respected the type training a boy would go through at times, but it was to toughen us up. Having a tug of war with a long rope was a good activity although there were other things tougher. The parent would be there encouraging the boys.

Carolyn's Dad was a foreman at Will Gum's ranch. He would hire my brother, about four years older me, to be a gate swinger during the hay season. He loved the job. When he saw a load of hay coming, he would shove the gate, get on it, and ride until it stopped. That way the load of hay would not have to stop. Besides that, he made 15 cents a day doing it. The gates had to be kept closed. A big challenge was, how much was a penny worth.

About twenty yards or so in the back of the Jobe store was a ground yellow jacket's nest. The men came up with the game for the boys to toughen them up. They decided to throw pennies in around the yellow jacket's nest. We younger boys, along with the older boys, would go in after a penny. After they had made the yellow jacket's angry on top of the ground. We got to keep the penny. Sometimes, five boys would get a penny each, and we would buy a big soda water. Soda water is what the old timers called soda pop. We would find a shady spot and take turns taking a drink of it.

I was at Carolyn's house one time and was looking at the wall at a box with a cord hanging down from it. Her mother asked me, "Do you know what that is?"

"No, Ma'am. I have never seen anything like that before."

Carolyn's mother brought in a high back wooden chair and lifted me up in it. She turned the crank on the side. There was a thing that you put up to your ear at the end of the cord, and a horn that you talked into coming out of the box.

She said some things into the horn on the box, and I heard, "This little boy wants to talk."

I stretched my little body high where my mouth would be in front of the horn. Carolyn's mother said, "Say, hello."

I did, and a woman's voice came out of the thing that was at the end of the box. She said,"How are you today, Billie?"

I was so scared that I am not for sure I even answered back. I was looking at the box attached to the wall wondering how that lady could have got in there.

Carolyn's mother said something in the box and said," Goodbye."

I asked her who that lady was that was on the inside of the little box. I think she said, "Someone in Alton."

I was nice and kept listening, but she wasn't going to get me to believe that.

FARM BOY'S LEARN EARLY IN LIFE

Dad taught us things that didn't seem too important to us at the time, but as time went on we could see what he was saying. We had two horses that were wild prairie horses that were not broken. My dad bought them for five dollars each. We called them Jake and John.

We had one of those rail fences that would go out then come back in stacked, because that was the easiest rail fence to build. It stood about five foot tall. Both of Jack's legs were scarred up from trying to get out. Finally, we got Jake where we could work him and ride him. He had most of his wild days taken out of him. John was easier to control and we finally got him where we could work him. But he would turn wild from time to time at a bat of an eyelash. As long as he was with Jake pulling a plow, he would usually be a good worker.

We could now ride both of them, but they were hard to catch. Dad preferred that we ride Jake. But from the time when I was six or seven years of age, I never knew of my Dad saying, "Don't ride those horses, you might get hurt."

John was a smaller horse and a better riding horse. He might be tame for three or four hours. Then he would see a leaf turn over or something else and turn wild again. You would be on the ground before you knew what happened.

We usually crawled up on the log barn or big stump to get on them. First lesson I heard from my Dad. I was thrown on the ground, and he said, "Hurry and get back up on that horse."

He was a believer that if a horse bucked you off, you had to get back on him or he would continue bucking the rider off.

The second lesson was simple. Most of us carried aluminum cups that you could push down on it carry in your pocket. They were about the size of a snuff can when you pushed down on them. When you come to a spring you could pull up on it, and it made a cup. Springs were almost everywhere at that time. Some may be just a small drip off a rock, and others would be small streams. When you come to one of these, you let the horse drink. You would take the cup out of your back pocket and have a drink yourself. When this happened the first time, the second lesson came.

Dad said, "What are you doing boy? You never drink downstream from the horse. Go on the other side and drink upstream from the horse."

On Saturday morning at certain times of the year, we would harness the horses and have a big log chain tied to the harness. We would head for the woods to cut trees into logs. Then we would chain the log so the horse could pull them to the house to be cut up into firewood. I loved working John on this job.

Lesson three, if the horse gets wild, let him go with the log and not try to hold him back, because that log will get you. This lesson waas learned when John got wild, and Dad told me to let him go.

Then I heard Dad mutter to himself, "Maybe that log will hang on another tree and teach him a lesson."

There are many more lessons that some boys don't have to learn. These are just a few about horses.

IS IT BAD ENOUGH TO TELL MOM?

When we got sick, cut or something else happened to us as kids in Oregon County, we would evaluate ourselves and think, is it bad enough to tell Mom?

I hated some of the treatments of the early days in Oregon County. Since we did not wear shoes in the summer time, it was a sure thing that you were going to step on a broken fruit jar or a board that had a nail in it. We knew the rusty nail needed to be soaked in coal oil, and that wasn't so bad. We could tell if the cut was deep and bled too much for us just to tie a rag around it. Then Mom needed to take care of it. I can see her today mixing up brown sugar and turpentine to put on the wound, wetting a cigarette paper with a mixture of soot and lard to put ove it, and wrapping it with cloth.

We would cope with an earache sometimes to keep from having those drops of castor oil in our ears. If we were lucky they worked and we would not have to have the machine oil drops in our ears or smoke blown into them.

Headaches we would suffer with to keep from having to have that camphor and white whisky rubbed on our heads. I didn't mind having poison ivy because that was just a mixture of buttermilk and salt, or vinegar and salt rubbed on the skin.

I never knew what the seven year itch was but heard a lot of talk from people who said they had it. For an itchy skin, Mom used sulfur and lard. That is another thing we tried to avoid.

The chest cold was the most dreaded for us kids that we could not hide well. Mom made us eat a mixture of honey and vinegar and then rubbed goose-grease salve on our chests. That salve would stink to high heaven.

Many people back in the olden days had problems with hiccups. A good scare sometimes took care of that. I read somewhere not too long ago about a young doctor who was seeing a lady that was 71 years old, and he told her she was pregnant. She ran down the hallway screaming, and an older doctor asked her what was wrong. The older doctor went to the younger doctor and asked him why he told her that, it scared her to death. The young doctor looked up and said, "Does she still have hiccups"?

I can remember back in the olden days when most men had arthritis. You would see them wear copper band and twisted copped wire around their wrist to keep the pain down.

It just wasn't fair when the adult men could have a hot toddy for a cold.

No, we did not have to go far to the doctor. Mom was the doctor.

ARE YOU SURE $12.50 IS GOING TO COVER IT, DR. CARHART?

Kids now days don't seem to have nightmares and walk in their sleep like we did in the olden days. I don't think I walk in my sleep anymore since I got older, but at one time it was a nightly event.

I put in over 11 hours of work today trying to get a pad ready for a carport. I went to sleep in my rocking chair on the front porch, and had a dream of something that happened the day before yesterday. I thought about this total stranger that I met a couple of days ago. I stopped at his business on the main highway and was interested in purchasing a two car carport. The door was locked and the business next door said, "He is not here but he will be back in a while."

I asked her if he had a cell phone she said, "Yes, but I can't give you the number."

I asked what his name was, and she said, "Bubba. I will give him a ring and see when he will be back."

She said he would be here in 15 minutes and I told her to tell him I would wait on him.

Now, this man was really a "Bubba." He jarred my mind back to some of the old timers that were around when I was a kid in Oregon County. Bubba drove up, and it was one of the cooler days for us here in Texas. He had on a tee shirt and sloppy shorts with no shoes on. He went around the car and took a little girl of about three years of age out, Then he came to me and said, "My name is "Bubba. Just call me Bubba."

I can't believe I spent a pretty large amount of money, dealing with a man called, "Bubba" with no shoes on. A little girl was trying to sell me two trailer tires all at the same time. After I had signed the contract with "Bubba", the little girl brought me what looked like a bank envelope to sign for two tires. I told her I wasn't going to buy them and then she said, "OK, let me show you my doodle-bug."

She was persistent. The only reason I spent the money with him is be-

cause he reminded me of the olden days in Oregon County. Anyhow, that is what I was dreaming about, and as a kid I would have been walking in that dream.

When I was about 19 years old, I fell asleep in the front yard under the Cherry tree. I don't know how come me to think I was a horse, unless it was because I had some trouble with old John a couple of hours earlier. John was one of our workhorses. Anyhow, I started to buck, and my younger brother saw it as a chance to ride a bucking horse. He got on my back, and he had a wild ride. Our front porch had big square post on it, and he had stayed on until my head hit the corner of the square post knocking me out. When I woke up there was blood everywhere, and Mom was there with her home remedies. She said it was just too bad and big for her to sew up. It had peeled the scalp off my skull on one side of my head. My scalp was laying over my ear, and I told Mom to put it in place as good as she could.

About an hour later I was drawing water from the cistern to fill the drinking water buckets in the house. We would use a dipper to drink from, or to put it in the wash pan that set by the water bucket to wash our face and hands with. Dad approached me and said, "Son, I think we should make a trip into town and let Dr. Carhart take a look at your head."

I said," Nah Pa, I don't have the money."

Dad then said, "You are a saver. Sometimes you don't even spend the nickel I give you on Saturday. There's not much that goes on in that house that I don't know about. I know you have $14.77 in that cigar box under your bed, and if it's more than that, I will help you a little."

All the way to town, I was thinking how hard and long it had taken me to save that $14.77. Now some doctor was going to get it. Dr. Carhart looked at it and said, "How'd you get away from those Indians?"

My dad knew him well and talked to him a few years later. I told him my Mom was a doctor too. He told me to lay on the bed that lifted my head up. He had a big crooked needle and some kind of thread that I had never seen before. I guess it was too late now, but I had already asked him how much this was gonna cost me. He said, "About $12.50. I am going to have to put 24 stitches in your scalp, and two weeks from now I will take them out."

I told him Mom was pretty good, and she would take them out. He said, "No, that is included in the $12.50."

On our way home, my Dad asked, "How'd that happen anyhow?"

I told him I had a nightmare in the daytime, but I was only thinking, "He got most of my money."

He said, "Your Mother says you get up every night and go to the kitchen table and shine your shoes real well."

I was upset, and I said to him. "When you say your Mother, it kinda makes me think we all gots different mothers."

When we got home everyone had to take a look. My younger brother said, "I rode you, and you didn't buck me off? Would you like to try it again?"

I was still thinking $12.50 for 24 stitches and said to him, "Unless you want to get hurt, you'd better keep your mouth closed."

Oh, man that little nap cost me $12.50, Never thought a nightmare could be expensive.

That time at Jobe when I jumped out of the second story window and landed in Mom's rock garden didn't hurt me or cost me a penny.

Yet, old Bubba was my man but he cost me a lot too.

AS KIDS WE WERE OUR OWN DENTIST.

Dad would sometimes help, when we got a loose tooth. There were several ways to pull teeth in Oregon County in the olden days. One thing that all of us boys knew was this, don't tell Dad or Mom. Just use your favorite painful way. If you let Dad or Mom know, they would stick their fingers in your mouth. If the finger wouldn't bring the tooth out with wiggling it, then Dad would get the pliers. We didn't want that.

We boys would work as a team in pulling a tooth. We would take a string and tie around the bottom of the tooth; then we would tie the other end of the string to a doorknob. The door would have to open in the opposite side of where you were standing. The helper would go on the other side of the door and not let you know when he was going to open it. The door would be opened hard. The tooth would come out hanging on the end of the string.

There was no such thing as a tooth fairy in those days, but we would carry the tooth in our pocket to show other kids how tough we were.

WISH DAD WOULD HAD LET ME WEAR MY HAIR LONG WHEN I WAS A KID

There are times that as a kid, I wished didn't have to happen. That even happens to me today. I can remember the name of my third-grade teacher well, but I can't remember where I put my glasses. I have heard many people tease about getting a hair cut with a bowl on your head. This is not teasing by any means.

Dad would say, "Everyone line up on the front porch. Hair cut time."

Dad would have a high stool that we sat on so he wouldn't have to bend over. Mom would have to help with the smaller kids because it was pure torture. Dad had a special bowl that would fit on the bigger kids head and a small plastic bowl for the younger kids.

Mom would bring the sewing machine oil out and a pair of scissors. Dad would put oil on the old pair of clippers. The clippers head was much like the ones they use today. His was not electric. It had two grip handles. When he squeezed them together, it would move the blade to cut the hair.

He tried to not gap the hair, but this was impossible. Those cutting blade would pinch the head because the blades were never sharpened. The older boys had to go first. I guarantee we had tears in our eyes. But we had to act like it didn't hurt as an example to the younger ones who would cry and fight against the hair cut. Mom would have to hold them in the chair.

Dad would use the clippers first, then take the bowl off and tried to angle the top hair down to the clipper cut hair. Yes, we did have a lot of gaps in our hair. But it was a haircut. My Dad thought he was a pretty good barber. But when I got old enough to have money of my own, I could go to David Combs. He and Truman Raley were good barbers. They charged twenty-five cents or sometimes nothing for me, because they were both sports fans and I played basketball.

I hope you remember these old squeeze clippers; they were pure torture.

A SPECIAL DAY IN THE SPRINGTIME OF EACH YEAR

I can never remember my Dad and Mother or any other of my friends Dads and Mothers buying a new mattress. Some would scatter the big lumps out into little lumps, and that seemed to work. Before we started on the special day, we boys had time to cut a limb off a tree about the size of a baseball bat. Now this was more than just cutting the limb off a tree in the woods. It needed to be

one with no branches on it, because you were going to make it as smooth as a baseball bat, or it would not pass Dad's inspection. We always tried to find one that would make a good bat after the special day.

Dad had tightened the wires on the clothesline as he did at that time every year because the ice-covered clothes on the wire during the winter time would stretch it. The bat had been inspected and laid aside ready to use. The front doors would be opened so that my older brothers could bring all the mattresses in the house out. The mattresses would be laid on the ground beside the clothes line. After they were scattered on the ground, Mom would take a broom and sweep the upside, and then the mattress would be turned over and she would sweep the other side.

Now, the mattress being on the ground was the beginning of the fun. You could get your bat, and while you slammed it into the mattress, you were watching your brothers out of the corner of your eye. Just to make sure they didn't lie to you about how high the dust flew on their hit.

Hitting the mattress did two things. It smoothed the cotton or whatever was in it out smoother and got the dust out mom had missed with the broom. The mattress would be turned over, and the same thing would be done on the other side. Now that old mattress has not had it final beatings yet. It would be picked up and stood on its end against the wire of the clothes line. Dad would hold it to keep it from coming under the wire with a wide board in front of his legs in case some of us boys hit it hard enough to be a home run.

When we got through beating the mattress, it would be stood on the outside of the T iron post of the clothes line. Then Mom would spray around the edges of the mattress on both sides. I asked Mom what she was spraying for? She explained she was spraying for what was called, "bed bugs" and also "dust mites." I guess if I ever saw one, I killed it, and jest didn't know what it was.

She said, "They will bite you at night." I ain't never heard of anything like that so, I guess I wasn't bitten.

After she stopped spraying, she would then bring out a pan of lye soapy water. Again, I was interested in what she was gonna do. She then explained to me she was gonna try and scrub out some of those pee stains from last winter. After she finished that, we or my older brothers would lean the mattress up against the tall garden fence close to the clothes lines to dry out the dampness that Mom had made getting those stains out.

I was missing out because my brothers had already started beating another mattress. The same process went on until the four or so mattresses had been finished. Mom gave instructions on what side went up on each mattress, and I think they were rotated from year to year.

Mom's job was just starting. While the mattresses dried, she dusted the bed frame of the bed and sometimes found something that we were hiding and didn't want her to know we had it. She would take it out and put it on the couch, and it would be part of some strong warnings when she was finished. Someone had told her a way to take all the old chewing gum stains off the bed post. After she had done that, she would polish the iron or wood with a polish that almost everyone bought from the Watkin's man.

She would also fry the tators while she was doing all this and check on the beans. A lot of days, our dinner would be tators, beans, and cornbread. At supper time, it would be cornbread crumbled up in sweet milk, beans, and taters.

After the last mattress was put on the bed and the cows milked, it would be supper time. Then we were called to the porch to be shown what she had found under the bed, and usually it was a woman in a bathing suit. She would destroy it in front of our eyes.

What a fun day for all, beating up those mattresses.

WE GOT THAT BAD COWBOY

When I was small and talking movies had come into the picture show houses, there was always what they called a serial that played before the movie would start. They would continue from week to week and would stop each week with the hero in real trouble. The kids would go as far as to ask a friend, if and how the hero got out of it. This was a selling tool to get people to come back to the picture show each week.

One movie I had seen almost 70 years ago, has always stayed with me. The sidekick in the movie was Gabby Hayes. I think the star was Gene Autry. Gabby, was penned down behind a big rock, and the outlaw was on his horse shooting.

Gabby had run out of bullets, and he turns to the ones in the movie house and says, "I need your help, I am out of bullets. I am going to point my gun at the outlaw and you all say bang."

There was a loud shout, as all of us kids yelled at the same time, "Bang".

The outlaw fell off his horse and was dead. Gabby turned to the people in the movie house and said, "Thanks to each one of you. You just saved my life."

It made us all feel good and we would talk about how we were a part of saving Gabby Hayes life. Simple things, simple life.

It was always a big thrill when the curtains in front of the screen would move to the the side and the movie would start.

TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOUR PETS

My brother, Cliff, had came down to visit Mom and me. We were just small talking, and he told me about this dog he had some years ago, that had taken sick, and he didn't know what to do about it. A neighbor told him he had one sick, and the vet told him to give it three tablespoons full of gasoline. I had never heard of such a thing. Cliff said he hadn't either, but he couldn't afford a big vet bill. He figured the old dog was going to die anyway if he didn't try something. He got him a small container and put a little gasoline in it. He then got a tablespoon and proceeded to force three tablespoons full down his dogs throat. It worked! He said that dog took off running around their house. He made about four real fast trips around the house, and then he just keeled over with all four legs straight up in the air.

I asked him, "Did he die?"

He said, "No, he just ran out of gas."

Joke was on me!

MATCH BOX TOYS AND MOM, I GET THE NEXT SPOOL AFTER THE THREAD IS GONE.

Matches had other uses rather than just building a fire in the olden days. Mom had her matchbox holder on the wall next to the cooking stove; she used the big nickel box of matches. We had three different kinds of matches. Goffer was used a lot for advertisement and were free. They were hard for most peo-

ple to use, because just like the name, you would strike one and go for another. Then there was the penny box of small matches that most pipe smokers used. The nickel box had about a hundred long (maybe three inches) matches that fit in the match case. You would slip the whole box in the case and raise the cover on the box. It would let matches out in a tray that you could easily get to them.

Dad would make a toy out of every box. The little one cent box made a mighty fine little car. The five cent box, by slipping the lid back, made a fine work truck. We would cut the top lid off and use it as the cab glued on to the front empty spot. It would have a bed in back with an open top. We would put sticks in the back and play like we were hauling timber.

Mom's empty thread spools were used as soon as the thread was gone. On the vehicles we would push over the best playground in the world; the spools were cut in half and glued on the matchbox to make a nice looking vehicle. Dad would cut gaps around the edge of Mom's thread spools to make cars that would be wound up and go for a small distance by themselves. The gaps gave the car good traction and would go over a small stick.

Our cellar at Jobe had a mound higher than the yard ground, and it was sand with no grass on it. We would lay out roads with hills on it on top of that old cellar. That is where we played with our matchbox cars and trucks. That was one of the best laid out playground that any kid could wish for. These home made toys were valuable to us kids. When we got through playing with one we would not leave it out to get wet. It was put in a safe place in the house, usually under the bed. We could not go to the store and buy things to play with, but we had wonderful toys when I was young. We had toys that you had to use your imagination with.

I feel sorry for little boys and girls of today's world, because parents will go to the store and spend $10 or $20 for a toy that is left outside and not loved like we loved the matchbox toys.

I guess the old long kitchen match went out of style in today's world, and kids might not know what a spool of thread looks like.

I was a little kid at the right time and live with those memories each day.

THE WIRE ON THE FENCE CORNER DID NOT MAKE A GOOD WRESTLING RING

I ain't for sure where this happened, but it was where someone had a T.V. set. Ah, get to thinking about we had never been out of Oregon County except

to pick cotton over in Arkansas. Those cotton shacks sure did not have a T.V. in them. So I guess it would have been at my sister's house who was ill. The sheriff drove us to see her because they thought she was gonna die. Yep, I am purty sure now that was the place. Anyhow, she had a real nice 12" T.V. set turned on. We were all talking about how on earth could they get those pictures in that little box.

All at once wrestling came on. These two guys started throwing each other around the ring, bouncing off the two ropes that went around the ring, and smacking each other good.

I looked over at Mom, and she was really into it. She was squirming and throwing a punch or two herself. She had already picked her favorite and would holler at the TV, telling her favorite to get em.

As I watched, one of them rolled up his fist and swung at the other one, missing by 2 inches or more. However, the wind from it caused the other man to act like he was hurt as he lay on the floor.

Mom was still into it. Her favorite was the one that was laying on the floor acting like he wouldn't be able to go anywhere for at least two weeks. He took a lot of punishment while he was on the floor, and some of them missed. Mom was squirming on the couch saying, "Get up and beat the tar out of that man!"

I told Mom that it was fake acting that was not real. She would have no part of that. After wrestling was over, she would say, "I don't know why anyone would watch stuff like that."

It impressed my younger brother and I. When we got home, a few weeks later, we happened to remember that sport of wrestling. Even though I was four years older than him, he wasn't too much littler than I was.

We remembered how they bounced off the ropes and sent the other one flying through the air. We decided that the fence corner in the front yard would give us two sides to bounce off of. We just wouldn't have any on the other two sides.

I took the first bounce off from him. I told him if you want it to be real, I am going to watch for my chance to bounce off the wire into him. I was going to make it hard into him. I got my chance. I hit the wire hard with my body. I was going to fly into him and take him to the ground. He was already bleeding and I wanted him to say, let's make believe like they did on that little box our sister had. Well, I had my chance, and not many Oregon County boys would pass up a

chance. As I was saying before, I hit the fence hard, and it give to make the hit harder. It just didn't happen. The barbed wire at the top of the fence caught my clothes, skin, and all. I'll betcha I didn't go over three foot from the fence with the barbed wire still hanging on and pulling me back. What made me mad was as I lay on the ground bleeding, my little brother came up and bent over me and started count'n.

Later years my mom visited me, and I had a TV and asked her if she wanted to watch wrestling tonight. She said, "Oh, that old stuff shouldn't be shown, What time are we going to watch it?"

She picked a favorite soon after it started and started twisting and trying to help her favorite out.

Now let me give some advice to the Oregon County boy. Fence corners don't make good wrestling rings with that barbed wire on top.

If'n you see miss spelled words, you're probably not from Oregon County anyhow.

THE LONG BARREL PISTOL AND THE MAN WHO CARRIED IT IN OREGON COUNTY.

My Dad was considered an expert shooter with a rifle and he taught me how to shoot and handle a gun back in the middle forties. He taught each one of us at a certain age.

Before he would start his teaching, he would demonstrate with all of us boys watching. He would put a long kitchen match on a post about thirty yards away and strike the match with his shot. He would tell us that the reason he wanted us to know how to shoot was so we wouldn't waste shells by missing. I guess it worked well because when I would take my kids out with guns, they would call me "Dead eye."

My Dad had a good friend that I will call only his first name, Alex. He carried a long barrel pistol on his side which stuck out of the bottom of the holster. I think I could fairly say that Alex was the best shot with that pistol than anyone I had ever seen, include Wild Bill Hickock and Annie Oakley.

He loved to be around us boys. I am not for sure if he had a wife or kids of his own or not. My Dad was always happy when Alex came. He and Alex would put on a shooting show for us boys. One Sunday afternoon Alex came over. He always carried his pistol with him wherever he went. I don't know if it

was against the law to carry a gun back then or not. But it made no difference if it was or not, because no one would take his pistol from him. He and my Dad visited. Then Dad noticed a cotton tail rabbit on the fence line along the highway. Now, this distance was more than a hundred yards. Dad wanted to show us how he could shoot it from the yard. He promised that one of us would go get it for my mother to fix to eat along with a squirrel she was fixin. My Dad was ready, and he wanted us boys to know what he was doing. He started talking as he took aim. He told us the rabbit was far enough away that he had to allow for that in his sight on the rabbit. Alex was anxious and had his doubts. Dad stopped talking, taking a few seconds on his bead. We all had our eyes on the rabbit. As the shot rang out we could see the rabbit make a sudden move and then fell to the ground dead. Even my Dad had a satisfied look on his face, as he said, "Go get the rabbit."

Alex was looking at his holster and the long barrel pistol as he said to my Dad, "Your wife sure does know how to fry them squirrels. Been kinda hungry for some of her fried squirrels."

Dad scratched his head as he always did when he tipped his grey cowboy hat and was thinking. Dad said, "I'll tell you what we orta do. Why don't we walk out into the woods with the boys and you can show them your shooting skills."

He explained, "Son, put the rabbit some place and we will skin it as we skin the squirrels and put its hide on the board. Tell your Mom that we will be back in a little while with ten squirrels. She needs to get the grease hot."

Alex had eaten with us several times and brought ten squirrels with him for Mom to fry. Alex knew how Mom wanted the squirrel shot. She would never allow us to shoot the squirrel in the head. For a special reason, that piece of the squirrel never reached the table. Mom would cook it and hold it in the palm of her hand. She would take a large tablespoon and crack the skull open. She loved the brains. Dad would never shoot a hog in the head at butchering time because he thought the lead from the bullet might poison the brain.

We had only gone a short distance until we saw the first squirrel. Dad raised his gun. But Alex said, "Wait, this one is mine, and I want him to run and I am going to shoot his nose off."

The squirrel was jumping from one tree to the next. While the squirrel flew in the air between two trees, Alex shot the nose off. It did not take long to get the squirrels we needed for a big meal.

Alex put on a good show with that long barrel gun.

There is something I need to tell you about Alex. He was as cross-eyed as any person could be, but he was an expert with that long barrel pistol.

A LOT OF FUN THAT WE HAD PLAYING GAMES IN THE DUST.

I was thinking back when I was a little tot and on those days on the farm in Oregon County, Missouri. I have so many memories that you could never, in all my born days tell them all. We could do so many things that other kids did not have the opportunity to do. It almost makes me feel bad thinking about them.

A good dusty spot was not wasted for us kids. It was a place where we took our sticks after smoothing the dust out and drew pictures in the dust. Those pictures would be large with houses, people and different animals drawn on them. Most of the pictures of people were stick type bodies but with real heads. We wanted the mouth to have an expression on it so when we were explaining it, (as each one did) to your brother, there would be a story with the picture drawn in the dust. Sometimes the story was good with a happy face and other times it might be a sad type story, where someone had lost a cow or something like that. My favorite picture to draw, would be one of those airoplanes that we all ran out in the yard to see from time to time, showing it up in the sky flying through clouds with a little farm below. It would include the house and fence lines with all kinds of animals. We would have so much fun telling what we had drawn to each other. Then we would go to another brother's drawing and he would show his picture in the dust off and tell his story.

We did one thing in the dust that was not close to the house. It would be by the old section log where we played the cowboys of the olden days of our time then. We could call it, "Mom's forbidden spot." The reason would be, because we did things here that Mom forbid us to do anywhere. It was an opening in the wooded area about a hundred foot behind the barn.

It was a place where we played real grown up cowboys with the circled logs to set on. It was bare where we would build a little fire in the middle. We all had wooden guns that Dad had made us out of wood as he relaxed on the front porch in the hot evenings. We boys had even gone through the work of building a big T-pee back there, that we could all get into. I learned a good lesson back there one time and I will never forget it, but you know I did it again when I got older with some friends.

We got our guns and put them in the long side pocket of the old bib overalls and headed towards our play place in the woods. I was still young enough that I rode my stick horse and it would buck several times on the way. My old-

er brother, that always tried to scare me and make me cry, decided we needed something to drink on this trip. He had heard cowboys that rode the trails in the olden days always had a bottle of whiskey with them. They would pass it from one to the other. He made a fast dash down in the cellar, just before you got to the barn and got a quart of old grape juice that mom had canned a few years before. We knew those old time cowboys had three things with them, a smoke, a drink and a fire.

After we had got there, I had left Lightning, my wooden stick horse, tied to a tree and was going to be as big as my brothers were from now on. We had the big half circled log to set on; we had the drink, all we lacked was a smoke to be a real old-time cowboy. Well, in that section of the woods grapevines hung from almost every tree. We decided we would all cut us a smoke. I was wanting to be big and bad, so I cut me a cigar.

We were all ready. The grape juice had an inch of white stuff on top of it and we tried to get up off with a stick, but finally decided just to shake it up in the juice. Now, we are ready to light up because a little fire was going and the jug was ready to be passed around. We were ready to tell stories of how we had shot those outlaws that day.

After a couple of hours of my brother telling me not to take a big drink, just a little one when the jug is passed to you. Well, I watched him and he was taking big drinks and saying, "Whooe." He had fooled me too many times, and I was going to be as big as he was so, I took my share. I needed to (what we didn't call bathroom in those days) go, and he told me not to go behind a tree. We all would need to go on the fire to put it out. We did. The game was over.

Did I have a surprise in store for me. I got on Lightning and he must have drank something because he could not run straight, and my brothers were laughing at me trying to ride him.

When we got to the pond, my brother unsnapped the only snap I had snapped on my overhaul and pull them off and threw me in the pond. They did not have to worry about getting underwear wet because we didn't wear them unless we were going some place. Anyways, when we got to the barn we had to stop and play a while, because we were all as high as a kite. Dad's grape juice must have had something in it.

We chased each other for a while and finally got to feeling better. I had also smoked too much of that grapevine cigar, but we all knew we could not let Mom see us like we were, so we played it off.

When we went into the house Mom said, "You all smell like grapevine smoke, did youns build a fire out of grapevines?"

My older brother told her we did build just a little one and put it out real good.

Now that spot wasn't bare because we played cowboys there, it was because Mom forbid us to play a game with marbles called, "Keeps." In that game you had to go to the old tree that had a hole under it and where we kept our marbles, before playing. We would draw a large circle and everyone dropped two marbles in the circle from waist high. Then you started the game by drawing a straight line about twenty foot away. Everyone, one at a time legged (that's what we called it) towards the line. The one whose marble was closest to the line got to shoot first, and next to closest got to shoot second and on down the line. No steel bearing was allowed to be used because they would crack or break a marble. The marble you shoot with was called "a tallee" and it would be larger most of the time and one of your prize marbles.

Well, shooten marbles to us was an art. You took your shot from outside the circle, and the art was to knock another marble out of the circle and make your tallee spin and stay in the circle. As long as you knocked a marble out and your tallee stayed in, you got to shoot again from where your tallee was. Be careful, ifn your tallee stayed in the ring and did not knock another marble out, it had to stay. I don't have to tell you which marble the next shooter would be shooten for. A good tallee could be traded for five regular marbles. When shooting, you arched your one hand on the ground and placed your shooting hand on top of it to shoot. The little finger would usually be sticking out, like those fancy ladies in the catalog drinking tea, when you were shooting the marble. That's really why the ground was so bare in the woods.

Now, that old dust did not cost Dad and Mom anything, and we did not have to go ask for a nickel to buy it with.

Ifn Mom would have caught us, we would not have gotten a whooping, but a lecture from the Bible saying that kind of action was gambling is all we ever got.

OUR SEE-SAW'S WERE PLAYED DIFFERENTLY THAN THEY ARE TODAY

Today you see kids and others on what we called see-saws. They are gently putting the person on one end up in the air and then the person on the other end puts the other one gently up in the air. Today it is a relaxing kind of thing, but it was a game when I was younger.

We would have two stumps about three foot apart and get a long heavy board that could take a lot of punishment. We would have a heavy metal round rod that would be clamped around the heavy board. The clamps would be large enough that they could move the board without moving the rod they were attached around. We preferred a hole in each stump that the rod would be put through. A little axle grease would be put on the rod and champs to make them move smoothly. The ends of the rod that went in the hole in the stump would be secured where they would not slip one way or the other.

Now we have a see-saw, and it wasn't for going up and down gently having friendly conversation. It was a game of rodeo. The purpose of the game was to put the boy's rear end on the ground that was on the other end. Sometimes when you were up in the air, the other boy hit the ground hard enough that it felt like your teeth was in the top of your head. You had to hold on and ride and force your end in the ground hard enough to make the one on the other end have to hold on for dear life and not be bucked off. When you were bucked off you were finished until everyone but one was bucked off, and the one who was not bucked off was the winner.

Just like the rodeo cowboy does when he gets bucked off of the bull, we would dust off our pants and shake our heads in disappointment, and look forward to the next ride.

WHERE DID DAD GET THOSE TIRES THAT GOES ON CARS?

I will answer that question on the front end of this story. I am not for sure, but cars were getting to be something that you would not go up and look at in the middle forties. They had started replacing the horse and wagon way to go somewhere. Before that if a person had a car it would draw a lot of attention. People would gather around it and have conversations about it. They would look through the windows to try and figure out how it was driven. Tires and many other products were rationed. You could not buy anything you wanted at any time you wanted it. Many people who did not have cars would sell their ration to someone who did.

Anonymous

My mind sometimes wanders into different situations when I start writing. This story was not to be about cars, but rather car tires. My dad would bring home a tire from time to time that had been taken off a car for us because we used them as toys.

Everyone had a tire. If not you shared. There we would go to roll those tires. We would have no shirt on with only one of the galluses on our overhauls slipped into its big metal button.

We had no shoes because to us, shoes were for winter time and church. Overhaul legs rolled half way up to the knee. There was a reason for this dress way, but I want explain it now.

Our house set on top of a hill with a dirt road leading down to the paved highway. On the paved highway, there wasn't too many cars passing by. You knew what time they would be driving in the morning and evening. So it made almost a perfect place to roll the tires. Sometimes there would be a strange car come by that you didn't know who it was, but not often. Most of the times the tire would not make it to the highway anyhow, but often it would and go across the highway and hit Tom Higginbotham's cattle gate. If it did that you were the winner. We played the game here, mostly because the tire would be easy to retrieve. If we went on top of a large hill, the tire would be hard to get back up. We also had races rolling the tires around the house, but Mom would not like that because it killed the grass. So we would usually race between two big trees with other trees in between.

I don't know where he got them, but they were sure fun toys.

WE BOYS HAD A WAY OF GETTING MATERIAL WHEN WE WANTED SOMETHING TO PLAY WITH THAT WE WOULD MAKE OURSELVES LIKE A FLYING JENNY

My Dad was a man who knew where everything was on our farm. He knew where every nail, screw, bolt, washer, hammer and every piece of lumber was because we had to repair things. He also knew how many he had. He would even keep the truck or car in a certain spot and it could not be an inch off that spot.

We boys would ask from time to time if we could use a plank of lumber and the answer would usually be "No," with an explanation of what it was going to be used for. Country boys back then from Oregon County would figure out a way. After some thinking, we come up with a plan. Here is the way the plan would go.

We would say, "Dad, I wish you would teach us how to build a flying Jenny as good as the one you built us several years ago."

Then we would start asking questions, "Where would be a good place to build one?"

He said, "You need to cut a big tree and leave the stump about three foot off the ground. It would need to be out there in the woods in front of the house and putting it out there you could also hear your mother call when it was time to eat. The top of the stump is going to have to have a smooth straight cut."

We would say, "There is a big tree out yonder like you are talking about that would be perfect, but we would probably have trouble getting the cut smooth."

Then he would say, "I know how to smooth the top, so that wouldn't be a problem."

We would ask, "Would we need a long thick board, like that one out by the barn?"

Then he would reply, "Yes, that one would work fine."

The questions kept coming. "How would we get a hole in the middle of that board?"

He would reply, "The hole has to be right in the middle for it to work right. It also has to be the right size for the bolt that goes in it. I have a wood drill bit on my hand drill that would do that. You know the one that has the wooden knob on top of it, and the crank in it helps you hand spin it?"

"What size bolt would you use?" We would ask.

He would answer, "A heavy big bolt with three washers, and I have some of those in the smoke house."

The only other thing we would need would be to get a sledgehammer and some axle grease that we put on the wagon wheels.

He said, "While you all are getting that stuff, pick up that old shovel handle. We will put it about 18" across the board of both ends to hold on to while you are spinning around."

We cut the big tree down which was about 12" in diameter, and he smoothed the top down. He drilled a hole in the middle of the board and a small depth hole in the stump so the bolt could be driven down in the stump. This small depth hole had to be exactly in the middle of the stump. We would then put axle grease in and around the hole on both sides. Now, the first washer goes on top of the board with the bolt, then the bolt was fit snug in the hole in the board. The two other bolts were placed with axle grease between each washer and then the bolt was driven into the stump.

A boy climbed on each end and others pushing the board as it came by them to make it faster.

Dad set down and had a small grin on his face. We would never have got it unless we knew how to talk Dad into being involved. So Oregon County boys figured out how to get things done, even though we knew how, and could have done it, but we wouldn't have got the material. Now, we have a Flying Jenny. One advice I would give a child would be not to ride the Flying Jenny on a hot day after eating your fill. They will make you sick enough that the person on the other end will holler stop; I am getting messed up from him being sick.

THE RIDE OF MY LIFE

When I was working at Garrett's Store in Alton, I was about thirteen years of age. I would go to the road, and someone would always pick me up and take me on to Alton. Mrs. Kirkbride worked at the sewing factory in Thayer. She would always stop and pick me up. Many times when I started walking, I would hear a car coming and look back and know who it was. Mr Kirkbride had a small ford car and he was a pretty heavy man. It would be lower on the driver's side than it would be on the passenger side, so he was easy to recognize from a distance. Very few times did I have to walk the distance to work or from work back home. I would thank the people always but felt a litter bothered about having to ride with other people. The Kirkbrides had a daughter that was named Phyllis.

One day a man walked in the back side of the store where we unloaded the old I.G.A.truck and said, "Come back here Bill, I want to show you something."

As we walked off the dock, he pointed towards a good looking bicycle. He said, "I'll sell you that for $3, and you can be at work and back home in no time."

I looked at the tires, and they were up and in good shape. Then he said, "The only thing wrong with it is that it needs a chain on it."

My brain started working wrong. I was thinking of the road and thought to myself, that hill by Tom Higginbothom's gate is steep enough that I could go down it and coast within a couple miles of store. So I bought the bike and had it all figured out how I would not have to ride with people anymore. I would push it up the hills and ride it down the other side of the hills.

First morning I got on it at the house and took off to work. Going down the lane to the highway was kinda fun until I was going to fast I could not turn right at the end of the land. So the bike and me went across the road and hit Tom's lower gate. It didn't hurt anything except put a bend in one of the bars of the gate.

I decided I better do something different, so when I went down a steep hill, I would drag my feet and keep the bike at a safe speed. I pushed the bike to the top of the hill, and it was a steep hill going down. I took off and started dragging my feet when I got up to a certain speed. This did not last long because I couldn't drag my feet enough because the soles were getting hot. So I decided to ride it out. There was a curve close to the bottom of the hill. I began worrying about making it around that curve. At the speed I was going, I could have been to work in five minutes. But I wasn't worried about that. I was thinking how would be the best way to make the curve. I decided to take the opposite lane and approach it on the high side. The wind was blowing through my hair, and I was flying. But I decided I had no other choice than to ride it out. As I entered the curve, I could feel the back wheel sliding a little. I was trying to stay out of the gravel because I knew that would wreck me for sure.

I made it and was so scared I started sliding my feet for a stop before I had to. When I got stopped, I pushed it on to work while people come by that I could have rode with if I hadn't had the bike.

When I got to work, I parked it in the back of the store. It could still be there as far as I know. Because from that time on, I preferred getting picked up by someone. If I didn't get picked up, I just walked the three and half miles home.

DAD, I WILL RUN AWAY FROM HOME IF I HAVE TO MILK ONE OF THEM SNAKES

Chores were all done, and we had about an hour left before it got dark and Dad was setting in his rocking chair. My Dad was a good story teller, but I believe that older brother that loved to scare me to death might have been better. My dad asked if we wanted to tell stories; storytelling was an art that many

had in the olden days of Oregon County. When Dad said, "We" that meant that he was going to tell us a story about his younger days. He started by telling us how to tell a story. He said, "Anytime you tell a story, put enough spice in it that people can see what you are saying."

My older brothers stories were out and out lies. I knew that Dad was warming us up for a good story. He startsed off by saying that he had heard of a church out of Kentucky and Tennesee called the Rattlesnake Church. "I heard they might build one here in Oregon County. If they do, I wouldn't mind going and watch what they do. If I did, I wouldn't stay unless there was a seat on one of the back two rows."

He explained, "You see; there is a scripture in the Bible that says if you have enough faith, you could handle a poison serpent, and its bite would not hurt you." He went on telling, "You see, those people start the service. When the preacher gets things going good and people shouting, they bring out big rattlesnakes. The people hold them. I have heard that a lot of those preachers have bandages in different places and if you ask them if they got bit, they would say, "My faith got weak.""

Dad said, "Now boys, I want to tell you right now. Don't ever try doing that because your faith won't be strong enough. Just kill em, you hear me."

I think those snakes were milked before they started handling them. In my mind I was thinking, it would be about like Dad to get some of those if they give milk. So, being close to the end of the semi-circle, because anything we did when you sat, we would sit from the oldest to the youngest. I might have been on the end cause I don't remember, but regardless, I was going to get my two cents worth in first. I said, "Dad, if you get some of them and want me to lay on the ground and put my hand up under their bellies to try and find their tits, I will be running away from home and I won't be back until you get rid of them."

After a good laugh, he looks at me and says, "I won't be getting any of them. The way you milk a rattlesnake is by grabbing him by the head, putting his fangs on top of a jar, and pressing the fangs a little. What looks like tobacco juice comes out. I think they make some kind of medicine out of it."

Why would you want to go to that church? Well when I was young we boys all has good horses and our only entertainment was fer four or five of us to ride them to a church that had lots of dancing and shouting. We would stand outside by the open windows and watch them. I guess I was just thinking about my younger days. I do that purty often you know.

Mom would then come to the door and say, "It's startin to get dark, and I don't want to light those lamps so get yourself to bed."

EGG SUCKING CRITTERS

An egg sucking dog was well hated, and no one wanted them around. They could suck several eggs each day. If someone wanted to buy a dog off'n you the first question asked was, "Does he suck eggs?"

Another critter you had to watch out for was a big black snake in the egg nest. They would swallow the egg whole. There would be a big round area where the egg was in his body. The snake would usually take it to a tree or some other place and wrap himself around something to break the egg.

My girl friend and later my wife saw a snake with an egg in it. My Mom took an ax and chopped it into behind the egg. She took the egg out, inspected it, saw not even a crack in the shell. So she wiped it off and put it in the egg basket. This girl would not eat eggs for years after she seen this. I had seen it done many times before, and it did not keep me from eating the eggs. We called these egg snakes, but I am sure that is not the name of them.

WE HAD MORE PLAY THINGS WHEN I WAS A KID, THAN KIDS HAVE TODAY, BUT THEY WERE NOT IN THE HOUSE.

When I was a small child in Oregon County, we had plenty of things to play with. One of the play things we had was the only one that Dad warned us about. I was little, and my brothers and sisters made sure everything was safe for me.

As I have mentioned before we had the rough rides on the See-Saws and the excitement of riding the Flying Jenny. We wore out our pants knees and the seat of our Bib Overhauls from playing in the dirt with small toys. Dad would make our toys out of Mom's sewing thread spools and rubber bands. We built road in the dirt and little hills for them to climb. We were masters at swinging on grapevines that hung from the trees in out in the woods. We also liked to climb the trees. I can still hear my Mom's voice saying, "If youns fall out of the top of a tree, and hurt yourselves, don't come running to me."

We always had a rope with knots tied at the end of it to swing out into our favorite swimming hole. We had some good races with our stick horses. One of the more dangerous toys that we had was called the flying log. Dad made us stop playing with that, but we had fun on it for a few months and would have been longer if Dad hadn't needed the ropes for something else.

The flying log would be a 6 or 8 ft. log about 12" in diameter. A gap would be cut around each end of it so it would hold the rope and keep it from slipping. These ropes would have to be long. They would be tied in the opposite direction of the log into a tree about 12 ft. or so high. The log would stand about three feet off the ground, and you would straddle it and others would swing it from side to side. You had to hold tight because if you fell off, the log it might come back and hit you. Then at times we would take the log and twist the rope and have a spinning ride.

Our toys when I was a kid would be outlawed by the government today. We did get hurt from time to time, but we would just grin off the hurt and not tell anyone.

Yes, we had many more toys than I have mentioned, but no toys that we could keep in the house, except for the two five pound Folgers coffee cans that were wedged, so there were no sharp edges. This would be our basketball. I had the best one and kept it under the bed, next to the two gallon white pot that was under there.

FARM BOY'S HAD FUN TOO

No, we did not have bicycles and other things kids enjoy today, but we were thinkers. If we wanted to have fun, we had to think up something.

Two things I remember well. One thing we had a lot of fun with was catching June bugs, tying Mom's sewing thread around one of the back legs and have contests on who could make their June bug fly the highest. Those old June bugs would make circles as they went up into the air. Like any other game, we sometimes had disagreements on who won.

The other game that I really enjoyed was catching, what we called lightning bugs. We would put on an old pair of pants that Mom would say, "They have bit the dust," and go out after dark catching as many lightning bugs as we could. Their tails would light up every few seconds. When it lit up, you pulled the tail off, and it would stay lit. I am not for sure if they stayed lit if you pulled them off when they wasn't lit. You could stick the light on you, and it would even smear and stay lit. It would make your body into funny looking things from those lights. I always enjoyed putting the lights on, so it looked like I was an Indian in full war paint.

The thing that I did not like to do that my brothers would do is mess with a tumble bug. I don't know if that was the correct name or not. But what they

would do was make a round ball out of manure and give it to the bugs. The tumble bugs would have their front legs on top of it and back legs on the ground and work hard to roll the ball whereever it was they were taking it.

My brothers would watch the tumble bug work for awhile and then pick him up and put him on the other side of the ball.

When you wanted to have fun, and it wasn't available, you had to think it and make it or do it. Modern day kids miss out on so much now days.

SAVE TO MAKE SOMETHING

This may not have happened to all Oregon County farm boys, but it happened at our house. I had a box and so did my other brothers that fit under the bed. My name would be written on it with a third-grade handwriting.

None of us boys would really fight with each other, but we could sure push and shove hard. You better not get into my box, or you will have a problem on your hands. This box had the most valuable things I owned in it. I will let you take a look on the inside of this box. It would have empty spools of mom's sewing thread in it, and then you would see a few rubber bands that I had found. A knife that was all but worn out, my best marbles, and the talley were ones you did not want anyone to take.

Strips of innertubes to make bean shooters out of were part of the box. There were other things that I won't mention, but one of the real important things was string. I would keep string for three different things. This string would come from flour bags, and some feed bags had string. A mop handle would be sawed off about 12" long and string would be rolled around it to fly a kite with. Then there would be a shorter piece of the mop handle with as much of Mom's thread that I could get away with. This was to tie on June Bug legs and let them fly in the air with me holding the end of it. Then there was the ball of string that I used to make a softball out of. The rubber bands would be used on Mom's sewing spools as motors to make them go a short distance.

I always kept short pieces of fine wire to wire the rubber to the bean shooter, and every leather tongue of a shoe I could find. This box would be junk to kids now days, but when I was small, it was my treasure chest.

THE THRILL OF A LUCKY CHARM

It was a good morning as I got out of bed and pulled up my bib overhauls. I made my way to the kitchen where my big bowl of Mothers Oats was in

the dish where I set, and I was just in time. I must have overslept. The rest of the family was at the table, and the rest of the kids had their big bowl of Mothers Oats setting in front of them.

Now the reason I mentioned Mothers Oats is because we could have all we wanted to eat, but we must eat our bowl of Mothers Oats first. I didn't care much for Oats, but you ate them first. Mom got a dish out of each box that she bought. That's how we had nice glass plates, cups, and other types of dishes. I didn't mean to get off on that.

I went to the milk lot to have my daily round with old Blue, that mean crazy cow that no one could milk but me. Even though I was only about eight years of age, I was a ruff grown man to that cow. It was really a show to my brothers to watch me handle her. I would start by talking to her like I would another person. I would get the cow kickers out and show them to her and say, "Are we going to need these or not?"

I could see her eyes drop and I would say, "OK, we will try without them."

After milking her I would say, "Good girl. Now if we have company today that might use the outhouse, I don't want you coming up and leaning on the door where they can't open it to get out."

After the milk was cooled down by stirring it, we usually took a little time setting on the porch. We like to rest before we got tared. That wouldn't make sense to most people I don't guess.

As I stepped out into the clover, right there in front of me was a four leaf clover. I put my finger close to it where I wouldn't lose eye contact. I was careful to pick it. Everyone wanted to look at it.

They said, "Let me see it. Can I hold it?"

It was ringing through the air. After everyone had a good look, then I took it to the living room and put it in the middle of the old family Bible. When I went back outside, everyone was hunting in hopes there would be another near where I found that one. They almost always no luck. I could feel the good luck coming on in my brains.

Another good luck charm was a worn old horseshoe. You could hardly go in a farm house and not see a horseshoe over the door with the open part open up hanging above the door.

If a person read what the horseshoe stood for and how it should be hung, we might not have had any. All we knew it was fun thinking it could bring us some good luck. We cared nothing about the history of it and how it should be hung.

The rabbit's foot was a charm that people carried on key chains and on rings where they kept the car keys. It was fun to walk down the street and spin the ring on your finger that had the rabbit's foot on it. These were good sellers in stores and had a metal cover on the top of it that the chain or ring fit in. I tried several times to make my own, but the old rabbit foot would start stinking in my pocket after a few days.

When a young man was strolling down the street, there was something special about spinning that rabbit foot on it's ring around your finger. First of all it made a young man feel a little older. It made the ones who seen you think you had a car to go with it. Yep, there would not only be one on the key ring, there would be one swinging from the rear view mirror. Now, that was more than cool.

What about those blue jean legs that was cuffed up and short shirt sleeves that were rolled up two cuffs with the collar slightly higher in back. No, here is the coolest thing of all, a pair if sandals with a hook on them and a rabbit foot hanging by a short chain from them. Yes sirree, I might not be able to afford them. But those boys were riding high and not setting on a Shetland Pony like I was. Just makes my bones chill to think how they must have felt.

I seen a rainbow that looked like it ended not too far away. I hurried to get a shovel. I showed it to my brother and told him I would split the pot of gold with him. I was pretty sure it was not going to be too hard to find. He agreed and off we went to find the end of the rainbow. We were very disappointed when we found that this rainbow didn't even come to the ground. It had either gone away or stopped at someplace in the clouds. Anyways, we could not find it. It had seemed to be just real close.

Now, I will tell you this, not all things would bring luck. There were things you could do that would bring you real bad luck. If a black cat run across the road in front of you. No if's or anything about it, you pull over to the side of the road and stop and did not cross his path. A person had two choices, make a U turn and go another route or wait until another car come by and cross its path first.

Another was never cross under a ladder. A bad one was if you broke a mirror, you would have seven years of bad luck. Cover up all the mirror's in the house when someone died in the house. Never step over a broom handle. I

could go on but us kids had one of our on. Never stick your head in a hole in the bottom of the tree because there could be skunks in there.

BOY, THAT SOUNDS LIKE FUN TO ME

I have written several stories about my older brother that was two years older than myself. No matter how many not true stories he would tell me, I would think the one he is telling now is the truth. Now when I was younger, it wasn't unusual for a girl to be walking down a dirt road and hear a car coming, and run out into the woods and hide behind a tree until the car had passed by. Dad had a road that was more a trail than a road, that you could get a wagon through, to the back road that run on one side of our farm. It give us a short cut to Lula church.

At the end of that lane and a little ways up to the right, a very shy little girl my age lived. She had a brother that visited our house often, but I had never seen him date a girl. He wasn't what I call bashful like his sister and he had a car. Joe would sometimes bring the car through the little lane to our house, which would be less than a quarter of a mile. Joe was a great guy even though he was a little different.

One day my brother came walking up the lane and I was in the front yard. He was really excited about what he wanted to tell me.

"I have been up to Joe's house and he has a date. I have a date and we are going to the drive-in picture show." He said, "Joe was wondering if you and Deloris would like to go. The only problem is, there is not enough room in the car for youns. He told me that he could put some quilts in back of the trunk, and fix the trunk lid where it wouldn't come down. When we get to the picture show, youns could go up front where they sell popcorn and hot dogs and sit at a bench they have up there. I'll give you enough money for popcorn and a soda water, if'n youns want to go."

I got to thinking, now this is a girl that would walk as near as she could to the fence line away from our yard, because she was so shy. When we were down at the highway, she would hide behind the big tree, while the rest of us got our clothes a little dirtier climbing upon the big rock there.

Mom had cleaned it up purty well around the tree and rock when she wanted Dad to learn her how to drive and he said, "No, that what ruins a lot of women."

Mom went out and got in the truck and headed down the lane towards the highway. When she got to the highway she was going to turn right and go towards Alton. She cut the steering wheel to the right, but didn't turn it back. She circled the big tree and rock for several times before she could think how to stop. When she stopped she got out and walked back up to the house and handed the keys to Dad saying, "Your old truck is down by the highway, didn't want to drive anyhows, that old truck ain't got no brains atall."

Mom never drove.

Anyhows I gotta thinking, she would be safe and I never got to ride in a rumble seat, and I think this would be fun.

Anonymous

He was talking again and saying, "They are going to be here about six cause the picture show starts as soon as it gets dark enough. You might want to dash on a little of something that smells good, women like that you know."

I think there is a bottle of perfume that our sister left when she was at home last time. Yep, it in the dresser drawer in our bed room.

I didn't want to act thrilled, but I left and wet a wash rag and went out by the barn where I knew no one would see me. I washed my arm pits and some of the rust from behind my ears. I knew I would be teased because it wern't even Saturday yet.

I decided to wait on the perfume that my sister had left until the last minute. I didn't want my two younger brothers smelling it on me. Well I even scrubbed some of the rust off the heel of my feet.

All I could think of is riding in the trunk of the car and how much fun that would be. Six o'clock came and he was nowhere around. He had gone to the highway and caught a ride into town.

Then it hit me. He has pulled another one on me. If'n I was bigger I would clobber him. Sad, but I was glad I hadn't put that perfume on yet. It had a strong smell. I will say it one more time, "I ain't never going to believe him again."

GEE HAW: TALKING TO HORSES

I will not mention any names, because some people may think a man and his sister were crazy, and they were not. They could do things and grow things in the Oregon county soil that most people could not.

They had a farm that was neat and well cared for. They wasn't much for being around other people and lived a few years behind the times. They had real good work horses and traveled in a rubber wheel wagon with two horses that knew what they were doing.

When the people of that time plowed ground or worked the soil up, a team of horses would be harnessed up the the plow or other equipment. There were not too many horses that didn't understand what the person said that was working with them. The horse language consisted of not many words. When you were plowing, if you wanted the horse to stop you would say, "Whoa." When you wanted him to start again, you would say, "Gettie up." The horse would start going again. If you were plowing with a team when you said, "Gee," they would angle towards the right. If you said, "Haw" they would angle towards the left. They understood what you wanted.

The man and his sister had someone visit them one day, and showed them how a pickup truck worked. He showed him where the brakes were, the foot pedal, and how the shift worked. He brought the old pickup and drove it up and down the dirt road in front of the house, until he decided that he was good enough to drive it to Alton which was about three miles away. He did fine and found a wide parking place around the courthouse. He did hit the concrete curb that ran around the courthouse. But in the olden days cars and truck were steel and could take a good hit without bending anything. They did their shopping and started back home again. He was upset about not using the brakes soon enough at the square.

They left Alton to go back home. That is when he forgot and started talking to the pickup like he did his horses. He ran off the road to the left ditch hollering, "Haw" at the top of his voice. As far as I know, he got rid of the pickup right away and said those new things that people were taking to, did not have any sense at all. And so he continued with his wagon from then on.

The animals on most farms were there for a purpose. They worked, produced or help supply food.

I LOST CONTROL. DIDN'T MEAN FOR IT TO GO THAT FAR

I should dedicate this story to my brother, Truman, who lives in Thayer.

It was a hot day and when it was warm, we boys wore no shirts, but on this particular day I wish that I had a shirt on. I was about 12 years of age and my brother Truman was about 8 years old. Truman was always big for his age and could pretty much hold his own with me.

Dad had me breaking ground between the barn and the crab apple tree that set out in the field between the barn and the woods. I was using a double shovel plow and very often hitting big rocks in the ground. It would slide to one side or another. If this happened you had to drag the plow backwards, and have to get the two horses to back up at the same time. The reins to the horses came back and was put around the waist, because both hands had to be on the plow handles. The old plow with that blade on it weighed about 80 pounds or more so you can understand that it would give a 12 year old boy a hard time.

Mom came to the fence and waved at me to come in, that dinner was almost ready. I laid the plow on its side and let the horses drag it to the barn. The first thing you did when you got to the barn was unhook the horses and lead them to the pond so they could drink water. Mom was still standing at the fence when I approached the barn, and waved for me to come closer. She told me to plow out the garden which was about an acre before I unhooked the horses. You just had to break out the middle of the rows which didn't take over thirty minutes or so, and I did. I unhooked the horses and took them to the pond for them to drink and since we had other things to do that evening. I let the horses go back into the field.

Anonymous

When I come into the house, I dipped the wash pan about half full of water to wash my dirty hands before I set down to eat. The rest of the family were already at the table. Mom turned to me and said, "Go to the cellar and get a jar of pickles before you set down."

One thing you would not do is to talk back or dispute any of Mom's decisions. I turned back to her and said, "I am tired. I have been plowing all morning. Why don't you make Truman do that?"

She turned around and said to me, " I told you to do it, so do it now."

The cellar set about a hundred foot from the house and I started through the yard towards the cellar. Truman was setting on the bench at the table in front of the window on that side of the house. He looked at me with a smiling Ha Ha look on his face, and stuck his tongue out at me. I could take no more. I looked down and on the ground was a rock about the size of a tennis ball. I picked the rock up and aimed at his head on the other side of the window. I threw the rock so hard that it went through the window, shattering it. It had a hole in it the size of the rock.

I went on to the cellar and picked up the quart jar of pickles to take back to the house, knowing that I was going to get a whooping. Mom did the paddling and whipping, and Dad did the whopping. A whooping was when the old double strap straight razor sharpener come off the wall and Dad would be at the end of it. I got a heavy whooping, that did cause some blood on my back. After I had been punished, I went in the living room and laid on my stomach. Mom brought a warm, damp white cloth and put it on my back.

That hole was taped up with clear tape. Every time I went home in later years, it would still be there and brought the event back to my mind. As far as I know the window had not been replaced when my Mom sold the house many years later.

Today, my father would have been put in jail for that, but then it caused kids to do what they were told and to respect their parents. I really think the legal control over kids today makes it difficult for parents to teach their kids to respect people and things.

DOES YOUR CHEWING GUM LOSE IT'S FLAVOUR ON THE BEDPOST OVER NIGHT.

I asked my Dad, "Has Little Jimmy Dickens ever spent the night with us ever? Do you know him, Dad?"

My Dad's answer was," I know about him and why he sings songs we like. He was raised on a farm and was the 13th child of a West Virginian farmer."

"Well, how did he know we put our chewing gum on the bedpost every night?" I wanted to know.

My Dad answered, "That would have been a good song for him, but he wasn't the one who sang it. A guy by the name of Lonnie Donegan sang it. That's what he still did after he got grown even. He was a rascal, he drank a lot and a gamblin man. He wore a dustman hat, and his old man was a dustman."

I wasn't a little boy when I asked these question. I just always took it for granted it was Little Jimmy that sang that song, and it became popular again in the 60's. Well I guess I was wrong, but I had always thought that.

My memory at that time was going back to my childhood days when we put our gum on the bedpost overnight. We would get a treat at times and that treat was a stick of chewing gum. We would try and chew it for a week. We would roll it in sugar the next morning, but that only lasted a few minutes. Honey was the same way. It would not hold its flavour for very long and it would break down the gum some.

The big trouble we had was that three boys slept in the bed and each one stuck the gum on the bedpost overnight. Sometimes after breakfast when we would go get the gum, one of the boys had taken a bigger piece and put theirs in the other boys place. It got so bad we would have to mark the gum itself. I would roll mine in brown sugar overnight so it would not be switched.

After a few years, the varnish on the bedpost would dull where the gum had been stuck each night. You claimed a dull spot and that is where you stuck your gum each night. The most sad day for me is when I mixed it with honey cone and the honey cone destroyed the gum. You were better off to just chew it and not try to flavour it. It might chew for a week if you didn't swallow any of it. I was wrong, but I bet Little Jimmy stuck some to the bedpost also.

I don't think many boys do that anymore, but if you do, don't try to chew with sugar cane, honey cone or bees wax or it will be destroyed.

HUNTING FOR THE HYHENAGUNIES WITH MY OLDER BROTHER

I will tell you on the start that my older brother that scared me so many times while hunting could probably put Will Rogers in the shade when it comes to making up things to scare me with.

My older brother loved to take me hunting with him because he enjoyed seeing me scared to death by things he would make up, more than he did the

hunting itsself. He would call out, "Hey Billy, I am going on a special hunt would you like to go with me?"

As a six-year-old boy, I had been hunting with him many times and I did not want to miss out on what he called a "special hunt." He said, "We will be going off the farm to a special mountain that I know about. So we will be walking a long way and if I let you go, don't complain to me about being tired, you gotta be a man."

I never had heard of a mountain anywhere close to our farm, but maybe I had missed something.

As we walked he kept building me up on the hunt and said, he was going to try and kill an old hyhenagunies that stayed near to the top of the mountain. After walking for thirty or forty-five minutes, we came to the big timbered covered hill. We paused for a few minutes to rest before we went upon the big hill. While we were stopped he said to me, "This may look like a hill to you, but you can walk all the way around it".

As we walked up the hill, he was killing squirrels. After killing the seventh one, which is what we had to have for a family meal, he looked back at me and said, "Stop here." He was bending over and taking a look at the ground and said, "This is it."

I asked, "This is what?"

He answered, "That's the old Hyhenagunies tracks."

I then asked what he looked like? He looked at me with a mean, serious look on his face and said, "Like one of those big Russian boars. But he won't be as dangerous as them. Let's set down here, and I will explain what to do when he comes from that direction," pointing his finger to the right.

I looked at the tracks, and they looked like hog or deer tracks to me, which I had seen many times before. Then I had a question, "How do you know he will be coming from the right?"

"Well," He continued, "They always have to come from the right. Because they only can go around the mountain one way, because the right side legs are much shorter than the left side legs. If he comes, we want to get behind him because if he turns around those short legs on the right side will cause him to roll off the hill."

I seen a hidden grin, and I was beginning to catch on to what I had fallen into one more time. After a minute or so he said, "Well I don't guess he's coming, and we better get these squirrels home and skin them."

After we had got home, I asked my dad, "What is a Hyhenagunies?"

My Dad looked at me and said, "I declare that boy. I'm wondering what he will grow up to be. There ain't no such thing. Go out there where he is skinning those squirrels and tell him that Dad told me he had already shot it and left it there because it was full of worms".

I did as Dad said to do and when I told him he had a blank look on his face.

There are no hyhenaqunies in Oregon County or anywhere else.

I DECLARE THAT BOY IS BIG AT TELLING WINDY'S, BUT HE IS GOOD AT HUNTING AND FISHING.

It was a cold day in February, when my brother says "Let's go get a mess of rabbits." The worms that they have in the summer time was gone because of the cold weather. Rabbits were as plentiful as just about any other wild game at that time.

It was a bad hunt for me from the start. The lonely old crab apple tree set in the field just before we got to the woods. I had a bad experience standing under it with our two dogs last summer. I was walking under the tree and two snakes fell out of the tree and one hit me on the shoulder.

Now those two dogs were good at everything, and they were not afraid of any old snake around. They could sling a snake and kill it almost popping the head off. Dude grabbed one by the tail, and Old Shep grabbed the other one. I was watching from what I thought was a safe distance, when Dude gave about his third or fourth swing. He popped the snake. This time it came out of his mouth and before you could say catnip, it flew through the air and wound itself, around my neck. The snake was dead, but as far as I was concerned he was very much alive. I bent over and started getting the snake from around my neck, and was wondering if the seat of my overhauls were still clean. (Can 6 or 7-year-old boy have a heart attack?) Must not, or I would have had one. I went around the crab apple tree and my brother wanted to know why. He had forgotten, and said I will tell you a story about those snakes after we get 5 rabbits, which that is what it took for a meal.

We walked the fence line around the woods and had our 5 rabbits as we came to the corner of the fence line. Then he started to do what he likes to do best. All at once he said squat down, stretching his neck with his eyes on the wood line across the field to the other wood line.

I said, "What are you seeing?"

He said, "Looks like we are safe, but if he starts across that field we are going to run fast."

I asked again, "What kind of animal are you talking about?"

He continued looking across the field he said, "I really didn't want to tell you this, but that snake Old Dude wrapped around your neck was baby hoop snakes. They were in a circle laying up on them limbs and when you walk under they tried to wring your neck and choke you to death."

Still looking across the field, he continued, "When I was real young, Dad and I saw one as big as a wagon wheel. You see what they do is put all but about 10 inches of their tail in their mouth, and the 10 inches on the tail sticking out of the mouth has stingers on it, and they roll like a wheel. Yep, that was a big one and they were so poison that if that tail hit a tree it would swell up and the bark would fall off and the tree would die. Yep, that was a big one, and we were lucky."

The swelling of the trees began to have me wondering if he was scaring me again.

He stretched his neck again and looked across the field again. Then he continued, "That was a bigern that come rolling across the field and was upon me and Dad. Before we knew it, Dad told me to hide behind a big tree. He had a pitchfork with him, and he was going to try and kill it before it got to us. You know Dad was purdy brave back then. When the hoop snake got within about 8 or 10 foot of him, he rared back and threw that pitchfork at him. It got the snake penned to the ground and Dad backed away. The middle point went through the snake and the other two points on each side and had him penned to the ground. Boy, do those rascals have a temper. He started stinging on that pitch fork handle until poison was running down the handle.

Dad moved in and killed it, but something strange started to happen. That pitch fork handle started to swell, and it just kept getting bigger. After a little while that pitchfork handle would make enough lumber to build a house.

Dad took it down to the sawmill, and had it sawed up into lumber and built a house with it. He then decided it needed to be painted and so he got a block of white lead and stirred it up in linseed oil, turpentine and painted the house."

Then is when I said, "I don't remember Dad saying anything about building a house."

Then he says, "It didn't last long, when Dad put the turpentine in the paint, the pitchfork handle started to heal, and it turn back into a pitchfork handle."

I knew now, this was a windy. When we got home, I asked Dad about Hoop snakes and he said, "I don't know, but there are none around here."

Then I told him about the story and his words were, "I declare, what in the world will become of that boy? He is a good hunter, he can catch a big catch fish out of a mud hole in the road, but he is really bad about telling those long windy stories."

QUAIL HUNTING IN OREGON COUNTY

My brother-in-law had some of the best quail hunting land that I have ever hunted on. There were two fellows that had twelve kids each, and they kept wanting me to take them quail hunting on my brother-in-law's land. I agreed.

My quail hunting partner had one of the best quail dogs around, and he could not make it this trip but he said, take the dog. Now I am not saying that I am an expert on quail hunting, but these two men I took with me made me look like an expert. When we walked out into the field, the dog was already doing his job. I had given instructions on safety because I knew these two guys were far from being used to handling a gun. I told one to walk about eight feet to my left and he would be shooting the one's that were flying left. The other man would walk about the same distance to the right, and he would be shooting the ones that were on the right. I would walk in middle and shoot the one's who flew straight ahead. I knew I was in for a dangerous hunt after about thirty minutes into the hunt. One of the men made a statement I thought was a joke.

He said, "You know that dog sure does pee a lot, but every time he raises the front leg and has his tail sticking straight out we seem to get to shoot at some quail."

I chuckled a little, and we went on and got in the middle of a bunch of quails. The man on the left had taken a shot and jumped aside. His gun discharged next to my ear. That was the start of my hard hearing until this day. I asked him what he was doing. He said, "I got scared, one almost flew up my pants leg."

Anonymous

They wanted to know how I could bring a quail down at a greater distance than they could? There were two reasons, and I gave him neither one of them. I was using a long barrel duck gun with a number 9 shot in it, and I was a better shot than they were.

After a while, the other man made a comment about the dog. Now this dog was a well-trained hunting dog. He said, "That stupid dog would stop, lean forward on one foot, stick his tail out straight, and stand there motionless. If he was my dog, I would not put up with that foolishness and train him how to hunt."

I decided the hunt was over and took the dog home and when we got to one of the men's house he wanted me to stay and have supper with them. I said, "Huh?" He repeated himself for me to come in and have a meal with them. Well, I reckoned for a few seconds and figured after he had discharged his gun in my ear, maybe I will stay and see if his twelve kids and wife were the smart ones of the family. I have never seen a table like they had. It had two levels. The top level would spin the bowls of food that you wanted around to you because it was so big. About a twelve inch level that did not spin was set a little lower, and that's where your plate set. I was about as smart at eating at that table as they were at hunting quail.

I can't put into words what it is like setting at a big table that the food was all on top and twelve kids and mother and dad setting around it.

There was a big bowl of yellow corn in front of me, so I decided to take a spoon and put some on my plate. This was a mistake. I was setting next to the Dad and the spoon of corn went directly in his lap. One of the kids wanted something and had spun the top of the table. My first lesson was that if you wanted something off the top of the table you either took the bowl off or grabbed the top where it would not spin.

The father tells the kids about the dog doing the number one on the ground, and how he raised his front leg and not his back leg, and my mind had forgotten which one was #1 and #2.

Yep, I have hunted a lot in Oregon County, but never encountered anything like this. I didn't figure there was too much use in explaining what the dog was doing, because they probably never would go quail hunting again.

RABBIT TRAPPING IN OREGON COUNTY

After the first frost, was good times when I was a small boy on a farm outside of Alton. After the first frost, you didn't have to worry too much about the rabbits having worms and not being fit to eat. It wasn't so much the meat we were looking for; it was the selling of the hides. We would put the hide on what looked like about a 15" ironing board, to stretch them. The buyer would not buy them if you didn't have them stretched and dried. He would come a couple times a week and pick the hides up that you had ready. You could get 15 cents for a rabbit fur. A good coon fur would bring you in about 25 cents. Seems the best I can remember, a possum hide would bring about 20 cents, (this was back in the middle forties). When the buyer come, we would take the hide off the board and reuse it again. He would throw the hide in the back of his big truck filled with many more hides.

I am calling these rabbit traps, but we called them rabbit gums. They were a box about 18" long; the back was closed with a board, but the front was left open. The top board was about 2 inches shorter because that is where the door slid down to close the trap. It would be braced on top and bottom so it couldn't be pushed open. The top board was the one that had to be right. About 5 inches back from the door, there would be a hole drilled halfway through the board with a stick drove down in it so the stick would stand up in the air about an inch less than the door was high. After this, we would bore a hole completely through the top board about the size of a marble. This is where the trigger would go down into the trap. The trigger would have a gap cut into it. After the trigger was set, it would be about an inch off the bottom board. The trigger would be tied to another stick. It would go over the stick in the air and attach to the door. If anything went into the trap, it would trip the trigger. It would go up through the hold, and the door would fall and close the trap where a rabbit could not get out.

After the traps were set where you wanted them, each one would be checked at daylight or before each day. Nowadays, not many 7 or 8-year-old boys would get up before daylight, get dressed as warm as possible, and put on

buckle overshoes. We would grab a bag and the club that we had to kill the rabbit with, a light, and heavy gloves to take off over a mile area to check the trap.

It seems to me that we had more and deeper snow in Oregon County back in the forties than they have today. A snow on the ground was when I most enjoyed running the traps. I can't remember how many traps I was to run, maybe between 10 and 20. The traps were all baited the evening before.

NOW GO WITH ME ON A TRAP RUN.

Traps were usually set where you made a circle and would be close to home when you checked the last one that you were assigned to. As I would step off the porch, I would start wondering if that first trap had a rabbit in it or not.

As I approached within seeing distance of the trap, I would be straining my eyes to see if the door was down or not. If the door was still up, I would take my time and just make sure the trap was OK, with a disappointed feeling. I would go off to the next trap. Again when you got close enough to see, I would strain my eyes to see if the door was up or down. If the door was down, my heart would start beating fast as my pace would pick up to a slow run to get there to see if I had got the rabbit or not. Yes, something was in there. You were careful to make sure it was a rabbit. When it was, you raised the door enough to put your hand with glove on up in the trap, pull him out, hit him in the head, and put him in the bag. The reason for the close examination before was because sometimes it was polecats or skunks instead of rabbits. I had my share of that and learned fast. If it was, you got a long limb and raised the lid up and run as fast as you could before he came out.

I will recall coming in one morning. Mom looked out and said to me, "How'd you do this morn. Billy?"

I told her I think I got five which was good. She told me then, "Get the hide off as fast as you can and bring them to me. I will fry them for breakfast this morning. I got the biscuits ready to put in the oven, and I will make gravy out of the rabbit grease."

We had really good meals during rabbit eating time cause Mom could make a lot of different dishes out them.

We had to milk early because the milk truck run early. After milking, we had to fill them big wash tubs full of water and set the milk can down in it. We would stir the milk for about thirty minutes to cool it off. That is the reason we had to run the traps early in the mornings.

We never thought about being poor, we thought we were rich because we made everything that one needs to be happy. I would not trade my childhood days for today's lifestyle.

Comments:
Bill, talking about the pelts being stretched on a board, My dad made money from pelts that were bought. I don't know what animal, but I am pretty sure fox was one of them. My husband is a pretty fair shot also, and can light a match... Norma Shirk

Raccoon pelts were what I was raised with. Daddy would stretch and sell them... Gwen Stites

When men were men and men had guns. Donald Pingleton

Rabbit, coon, possum we stretched on a small ironing board looking board and the fur men would come and collect them and pay so much per hide. Rabbit hide was worth about 15 to 25 cents when I was a kid and we got most of them from rabbit gums. The fox fur was tanned and sold, they would all be stiff when taken off the board and thrown in back of the truck. There was no market for squirrel hides. Bill F. Combs

SCARECROWS AND CROW SEASONS.

When I was a kid on the farm, I could not understand why they had a crow season. I had heard the men say, "I guess I'll have to eat crow," when they were wrong about something. I ask my Dad after he said that one time, "What does crow tastes like?"

He said, " They're not any good to eat, They taste real bitter."

What I couldn't figure out each year, Missouri had a crow season, when you could hunt a crow. There was no limit on the number you could kill. I looked up to see when crow season was for this year, and it is from Sat. Nov. 1- 2014 to Tuesday 3-3-2015.

Dad would let crow hunters come in each year, and we had a good place for them to hunt. Just off the wooded section was a big dead tree in the open, and it had a lot of limbs on it. The hunter would go to the edge of the woods out of sight, put their hand to their mouth, and start sounding like a crow. The crows would come in. Dad had taught me how to call a quail, but he seen no use in teaching me to call crow. But it was easy, and I learned on my own. I could not see killing something that you could not eat or sell the feathers or skin. Then my dad told me it was to keep them from eating up all the corn he was going to plant.

I loved the scarecrows that we would put in the corn fields to keep the crows away and thought that was just something we did in Oregon County. I loved the scarecrow most around Halloween when they would be put up by the shocked fodder around some pumpkins. Crows would pull up sprouting grain and eat corn, wheat and duck eggs. A single crow could eat as many as 120 duck eggs a year.

As I looked at the history of scarecrows, from Home Comcast.net and Crow Busters, I found that scarecrows had been around for more than 3000 years. Native American Tribes throughout North America used scarecrows or bird scarers. Most Indian bird scarers were adult men. They would cover and watch about three acres a day. In Medieval Britain scarecrows were nine year and older boys, known as bird scarers or bird shooers.

There was a time when farmers could not find enough bird shooers, because of the plague. They would have to stuff men like scarecrows upon a pole. In Georgia, Creek Indian Tribes use scarecrows or moved into huts in the fields. Seneca Indians in what is now New York, soaked corn seed in a poisonous herb mixture that would make the crow fly crazily around the field and scare away the other birds.

How nice it was to look out in a corn field and see scarecrows, but they were something that had been used for many years. I still don't know what they did with all those crows after shooting them.

FIGHTING FIRES

Every few years when I was a young lad in Oregon County, we would have a draught. When the families went from the farm someone had to stay and watch for fires. A lot of the fires were started by squirrel hunters. A squirrel would go in a hole up in the tree. The hunters would start a fire at the bottom of the tree and the smoke would make the squirrel come back out of the hole.

The fire story that I often remember in my mind was a man that was older than us kids. He had a mental condition but everyone treated him good and we didn't think about things like that. Alton was an outstanding town for treating the mentally ill as good as anyone else, and that is the one thing I can remember well. This is in no way making fun of the man. His name won't be mentioned. It wasn't even funny to us at the time it happened, but I do smile at the event now from time to time. He has been with the Lord for several years now, or I would not write this story.

It was getting late before the work was done, and his father and mother had to make a trip to Alton for feed and a few groceries. They asked him to stay home and watch for any fire that might be coming towards the farm. They showed him the five gallon buckets that were filled with water to wet the feed bags, because that is how we fought the fires. It had gotten dark before his parents got home. They found him setting on the ground exhausted. His Dad asked him if he had a fire to fight. He told his Dad that sparks were flying everywhere, but he could not see the fire. What had happened was the lighting bugs were flying. He thought that they were sparks, and he had worked very hard trying to put all the sparks out.

Yes, Alton did not tease or make fun of him because of it; he was well respected.

Once a year most farmers would burn their fields off. We always did this at night so we could keep the fire from getting away from us.

A WAR IN OREGON COUNTY THAT NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT

We called them corn cob wars. This was back in the forties when kids had different ways of settling a fight without striking one another with the fist.

I am from a family of 11 kids, which was not considered a large family at that time. Some of my relatives had more kids. One had 21, and another had 17. It seemed to me that most of the babies were boys. I guess the good Lord knew we needed more plowing and less cooking at that time.

When you have boys, there was going to be conflicts. When we were working the fields, and if a conflict arose while my Dad was around, it would be short. He was good at having you do something that was harder to do than what you were doing. If a conflict arose when he wasn't around, it meant war.

I will explain what I mean and the rules. One I remember well was a conflict from running around the old big oak trees we had in the lane outside of

the yard. Two of my brothers were running around one of the tree chasing each other and one turned and went around in a different direction. They plowed into each other and went to the ground. As they got up off the ground, one says, "This means war."

One would go to the other tree, and the rest would stand in the middle hoping to be chosen to be on one side or the other. The ones that were too little to be chosen had a different job.

A 55 gallon barrel was at the corner of the old log barn that stayed full of water from the rain run off the roof. The same was at the chicken house about 50 ft. away. We could use 5 square bales of hay on each side. They had to be put back where we got them when the war was over.

The little ones could not be thrown at. Their job was to keep throwing corn cobs in the water to make them heavy and more easy to hit your target. No shirts were allowed. You had to be bareback.

Each army had thirty minutes to prepare and corn cobs were plentiful. We even kept a five gallon bucket full of them in the outhouse. If you got hit by a corn cob, you had to retire from the game. We tried to make sure that everyone who had to retreat was hit good enough that they would have a brown imprint of a corn cob on their backs the next day.

After the game was finished, and the hay put back where we got it, we would jump into the pond to soothe our hurting backs.

By that time, we couldn't remember what the conflict was, and we all would be friends again and the dispute forgotten.

TWO THINGS WE LOVED TO DO AS KIDS, ONE NASTY, ONE DANGEROUS

I think these two things are a thing of the past because nowdays parents even on the farm limits what their kids can do and not do. I am not real familiar what the proper name is of some things, so I will just call it the way we called it in Oregon County in my childhood days.

As kids we did not do too much by ourselves, we would do it with our favorite brother or one that wanted to do what you wanted to do. On a lazy day

that was not too hot or too cool we might head towards the barn in the milking lot. The ground was not dusty, and no grass grew there but it was finely ground cow manure. It did not smell and was soft to set on. It wasn't very hard to find what we called tumblebugs. A tumblebug was very hard and resembled a June bug. They would be rolling a round ball of manure about the size of a big marble. We would pick up the tumblebug and his ball and set where we could spread our bare feet apart as far as possible. Each one would place the ball by one foot and watch him roll it to the next foot. Instead of touching the ball again, we would pick the tumblebug up and place him on the opposite side of the ball and watch him roll it back to the next foot. I don't know where they were taking those balls, just never asked. We had washed our hands in the granite wash pan by the lye soap before we went to the table to eat.

We would watch the clouds and point out different kinds of things they looked like while this was going on. We could enjoy ourselves for several hours doing this.

The other thing we loved to do was dangerous. What we would do is find an old snapping turtle and put a long stick up by his face, and he would snap it in two. Dad and Mom both would warn us that the neck didn't look too long, but he could extend it out about 6 inches. They moved slow but the neck was very fast, and the jaws were very powerful. If one of those got a hold of you they wouldn't let go until after the sun went down.

We were allowed to do things back when I was little that mothers would not let kids do today. You would get dirty playing with the tumblebugs. If they hadn't taught us about the snapper turtle, we would probably have been hurt bad, but we knew to use a five foot stick and one big enough to give his jaws a challenge.

I am now thinking; we got a good education when we were small, and most of it was taught out around the barn.

Comments:
Yes, out behind the barn! Bill, didn't you guys smoke grapevines or use rabbit tobacco and make cigarettes. We caught huge turtles, in Spring River and got them to fight each other; they'd get hold and hang on. We did a lot of things that wasn't good, like putting a tree frog under a horse's tail. When the horse clamped down, and the little frog dug in his toe nails, it was a free rodeo.
Max H. Evans

MY BROTHERS JUST KNEW HOW TO DO IT.

My two brothers older than myself had done some good figuring. My Dad used the words, "The way I figure it," often in conversation. My older brothers picked it up and would use it from time to time.

It was getting within a few weeks of school starting, and there would be nothing better than to stick your hand in the pocket that did not have a hole in it and rattled change, if you could ever come up with two coins. My two older brothers had been visiting the farm just across the gravel road that ran down the side of our farm. I am not for sure, but I think they took a cow over to visit his bull for a little while.

This man had some of the best coon dogs around, and they were hounds. They were worth a lot of money at that time and worth more if a car hit one of the 13 he had. When my two brothers arrived, he was in the barn with one of the hounds having pups. My brother told me he had never seen anything like that. She just kept having pups. After she had finished having the pups, he stood up and scratched his head, and said, "Too too many for her to feed. How would you boys like to have a dog each?"

My brother that is next in age to me pointed to one and said, "I would like that one."

The man looked at him and said, "If youn's wants one each; you will have to take the two that I give you." After looking the pups over good, he handed both brothers a dog. They both were on cloud nine until Dad wanted to see what they were so proud of.

The lecture then started. "The two dogs we have are work dogs and hunting dogs and that is the only thing we have enough scraps to feed. Tell you what boys, you all feed them your scraps until they get to be about two or three weeks old and then you give them away, because by then they would be able to fare for themselves."

Dad came home from Alton a few weeks later and said, "I talked to old Alex, and he said he knew a guy who was hunting for some young hounds. He said that he would see him in about two weeks and tell him you have two hounds that he might want to look at." My Dad told him, "They look like good-erns."

The plan started to work in the older brother's mind, and he told my other brother that when the man came to let him do all the talking. The older

brother figured $5 a piece or maybe $10, and they would both be rich. The day came when the man drove up and the pups were with my older brothers out in the front lane just out of the front yard. This I had to see, but the older brother took me by the shoulder and told me to stay behind him and don't be rattling my mouth.

The pups seem to like the man, and as he was scratching behind their ears, a deer comes up and stands in between the two big oak trees. Those pups were just like lighting; they took off after the deer. My brothers got them back. The man turned and spit a big wad of tobacco in the dust, asked, "What was you boys thinking in terms of money?"

My older brother said, "You wouldn't have enough to buy them if Dad would let us keep them. Some guy back in yonder, really wants them, but he ain't got the money."

The man bends over again to rub the dogs. He raised up again and said, "I'll tell you what, I will give you $25 each for them and that is as much as I can go."

My older brother was a smart trader. He looks at my other brother and says, "I don't know, would you be willing to let yours go for $25?"

He just shrugged his shoulders, with neither a yes or no. The older brother then turns to the man and says, "I hate to let them go for that, but Dad is not going to let us keep them. Give him $25 and me $25, and the dogs are yours."

The rest of the day my older brother would show me a $10 bill and say, "I have another one and a five dollar bill. Feels good to be rich, but you seen how it was done today."

I STILL HAVE NOT GOTTEN SOME OF THE OLD TIMES OUT OF MY EVERYDAY LIFE

When we built our cabin in east Texas, I used a lot of the old time Oregon County ways of doing many of the things we did.

We needed a water well, and I called a water well driller. When he came to meet me at the property, I had a steel rod in the ground exactly where I wanted him to drill. He asked me why I was so precise on the exact spot, and I told him, "That is the middle of a big spring river under the ground." He looked at me and said, "I have been drilling water wells for over fifty years. What you do is find a location that you would want the well house and drill until you hit water."

Lying on a stump not too far away, I had made two wires out of clothes hangers that were about 12 inches long and bent on one end to fit through the palm of the hand. I would hold the two wires about 6 inches from one another, and when there was water underground, they would cross. If the water was large and within thirty or forty feet of the ground service, the pull will be hard and the two wires that were sticking forward out of your hand, would line up in a straight line. I told him this was called, "witching for water."

He looked at me with a smile and said, "That don't work."

So I put the two wires in his hand, and we walked off about twenty feet. I told him, "You want be able to keep those wires from crossing when you get over water." I told him to walk towards my steel rod where I wanted him to drill.

No matter how hard he gripped he could not keep the wires from crossing and said, "I don't understand that."

He said, "You are the one paying for how deep we go, so I will drill where you say".

I told him I was raised in Oregon County, Missouri and this is the way we did it when I was a kid. We would hit water less than fifty foot down because the force was so great.

Water Wagon (Anonymous)

He started drilling and had a what in the world is wrong with that man look on his face. After he started drilling I asked him how deep he was and with joy in his eyes, he said, "34 foot and I am in the middle of your big spring."

He loaded up the drill and said, "Show me how you made what you call a water witch and show me how to use it again, but I would never trust it."

A neighbor came by and said, "You put your well in the right spot. If you wanted to look, you would see at least four wells in line with yours. There is a big river about 30 ft. or so under the ground, and you're in it."

The driller was mumbling to himself in disbelief.

One more thing I brought from Oregon County, was this. My daughter had put a dozen or so chickens in the chicken house, and they would get out and scratch during the daytime. Back on the farm in Oregon County, you had to watch the sky for chicken hawks. They would scoop down and pick up chickens and carry them off, so we had to kill them when we seen them flying in the sky.

I have a big tree back in the woods on the place here that has red tail hawks but didn't want to kill them unless I had too because they are rare. Even though we didn't lose a chicken to a hawk, I still kept my eye on the sky. Coons and other wild animals would be a big problem, but my daughter would keep them locked up at night. We lost very few over the years.

I still won't walk under a ladder. I will not pick up a frog and take a chance on them wee weeing on my hands because Mom taught us it would cause us to have warts. There used to be women who could get rid of warts in a few minutes time, but those days are gone, and those women are no longer around.

COMMENTS:
"I have done some witching for water, and it works! Years ago, I had a school book that said grasshoppers spitting on you would cause warts. I have only seen that in one book, and I assume they came to the conclusion it was an old wives tale. As for frogs, I don't worry about them. My kids have caught lots of them, and I am sure they have been peed on many times, and none of them ever had warts. I am not superstitious, but I don't consider witching superstition, as it works." Norma Shirk.

STOP RIDING THE SAW, YOU'RE WORKING ME TO DEATH.

Maybe I should explain this because I am getting older and forget that the younger generation does understand some of my expressions. A cross cut saw was a flat peace of steel that was smooth on top and had large teeth on the bottom that had to be sharpened each time you used them. This made them cut through the wood of a tree better. It was about eight foot long and had a handle sticking up on both ends. There were also one handle ones, but we never owned one of those.

At our farm, every Saturday morning was wood cutting time. We had two stakes of wood. One would be the ones from the saw mill that we called slabs that were split for the cook stove. The other stack was just trees sawed up and split.

Let's go back to a Saturday Morning in the forties and early fifties. The milking would be done. The water had been drawn up from the Cistern and put in a big wash tub. The milk can with the milk had been set down in the water and stirred to cool it off. Of course, we had a big breakfast about 5 A.M.

We were ready to head to the woods and cut wood around 8 A.M. Dad would come out with a cross cut saw he had sharpened. The two horses was harnassed with a big chain rolled up on each one of them. These two horses were what was called prairie horses. (Wild horses rounded up and sold for $5 a piece. But you had to break them yourself. They would turn wild at the turn of a leaf. Old Jake was little less wild than old John was).

After we got to the woods, Dad would have picked out the trees he wanted cut. The one that was going to use a double blade ax would gap the tree. That would make it fall where we wanted it. One of us was on the handle of each end of the saw. One would pull it his way, and the other would pull it his way until we had cut through the tree, and it lay on the ground. The one who was using the ax would cut all the limbs off and make a log out of the tree.

After he got us started, Dad would usually have to go back farther in the woods and use the bathroom. (It must have taken him a long time because we didn't see him again until the work was finished.)

When we used these cross cut saws, you could not push down any while the other kid was pulling the saw through. You had to let the teeth do the cutting, and sometimes my brothers would throw a clod of dirt at me and say "You're riding the saw."

It would make the saw hard to pull through if one started riding the saw.

Now we would have five or six big trees cut into logs. We would tie the chain around the big end, and the horse would drag it to the house. The log was left, and it would be sawed up during the week. Dad used this as punishment sometimes to make you go slit or saw wood that had been drug up.

Dad would usually let us have everything done in order to eat lunch at noon. Then we would take a bath outside in the old big wash tub, go to Alton and stay until milking time.

Yep, somebody was always "Riding the saw."

OREGON COUNTY ICE SKATING RANKS

I get reports in the winter time of how cold it is in Oregon County. When my brother or sister tells me how cold it is at different times, I think back to when I was a little boy and how cold it was in Oregon county and how much fun we had on those cold days. My brother and his city wife were visiting, and it was real cold, I am thinking it was below zero.

When we finished milking the cows, which would be left in the milking lot in the winter time at nights, we had to cut the ice on the pond so they could drink without getting on the ice. After we had cut the ice was when the fun began. We didn't have to stir the milk to cool it down because nature took care of that for us. After cutting the ice and letting the cows out to water, we would line up, and one by one make a run for the ice on the pond and see who could slide further.

My brother's wife was a city girl. I asked her if she wanted to go ice skating with me. She looked at me and asked, "Do you have a skating rink in that little town?" I told her we had our own skating rink. She said, "I don't have my skates with me." I explained to her that rubber boots that we milked in was the best pair of skates you could have. I could see in her face, this little farm with a small house on it has a skating rink. I told her we skated different on the farm than what she did in the city. I said, "We got a pair of tennis shoes that will work fine for you."

I suggested that she watch us boys skate across the pond first, so she could see how it was done. Finally, it was her first try. She ran towards the ice just as she had watched us boys do. The trouble she had was she didn't stop running and start skating soon enough and found herself sliding across the ice on her rear. After a while, she caught on a little bit and admitted that this was fun.

To educate her a little, we told her how important that pond was to us. It's not only a watering hole for the animals, it's a skating rink, and what you call a swimming pool and a fishing hole. She wondered why the hole was cut where it was cut. We told her if we went to town, on the way you might see what you would call art, but to us it is the saddest sight of all. There might be 4 or 5 or more cows sticking up out of the ice from the back of their front legs to their rear end. Dad would always get upset at this sight and blame the owner for not taking proper care of the animals.

The city people would always enjoy the big horse pulled sleds and would almost admit that we were better off on the farm than they were in the city.

I will never forget when the state of Missouri turned brown bear loose in Oregon County. They did a lot of damage before the farmers could kill them out. I had six pet fish in the pond that I called Goldfish, but they were large Carp and they would let me come up and stroke them on the back. But those old bears ate them.

Oregon County had a lot of what we called Government ponds, and the land owner had to keep a fence around them. Never could figure out why. Those cold winters were as much fun as spring, summer, or fall.

STRING DOORS AND DIRT FLOORS IN OREGON COUNTY

We will be talking about from the twenties to the early forties in this story. Before I start this story, I want to say that my Dad was a pretty good carpenter, and I did not live this way. We had relatives and friends who lived farther in the backwoods, as the expression goes. All the houses that we lived in had knobs on the doors and wood floors. I am not for sure that there are any backwoods left in Oregon County.

We may have had a string door on the back door when we lived in Jobe. Even people that are 40 and 50 years old will probably not believe this story. It's kinda like my kids when they were real young telling me, "Tell us again about when you were little and had to walk three miles or so to school and then that far again to get home".

Let me first explain what I am calling a string door. It was a wooden door made out of lumber and there would be about a marble size hole in it about a foot higher than the door knobs we have today. On the inside of the door, a board was fixed like a lot of people use today to keep the farm gates closed. It would be one long 2x4 that would be hammered into the door and another 2x4 nail to it that stuck up higher. This caused a gap where another 2x4 would slide down in the gap. The end of the 2x4 that raised and lowered back down into the gap had a cord on it. That cord ran up through a small hole and hung loose outside the door. The 2x4 that raised and lowered was put on with a bolt and nut. The nut would be on the inside, so no one could take a wrench and take it off without being on the inside of the house. Most doors that lead to the outside open towards the outside.

The string would stay outside during the daytime, but at night you would pull the string inside so no one could get in. Many of the farmhouses had door knobs that were a black metal a little higher than it was wide. They used skeleton keys to open and lock them with. A skeleton key was a long piece of steel

with the lock part on the bottom). There was a problem with skeleton keys. The company that made them only made ten or so different kinds and your key might fit several other peoples doors. I never figured out why they would lock the door and hang the key on the wall when they were gone.

My Dad told me, "If the door is locked, that means we are not at home, and if a person wanted to rob the house they could get in anyway. But if some of the family came when a person was gone, they had the key to get in".

DIRT FLOORS

I only have visited in two homes with dirt floors in my childhood days. One home had what would be called a top grade dirt floor. What this meant was that they put clay down and packed it smooth, then wet it and packed it again. The other was just dirt packed hard on the top for several inches down.

I know you think these homes must have been dirty. No, they were swiped with a broom as often as a wooden floor would be. Some of the homes that did have wooden floors would have cracks big enough that you could see the ground below.

Understand I never had to live with any of this except the Skeleton Key.

PIE SUPPERS WITH GOOD OLE HOE-DOWN DANCING

In a comment made by Max Evans last night started my mind thinking. He asked if we had pie suppers in my neck of the woods. My answer was yes, but what I wanted to say, was too long for a comment. Now in my younger days, in Oregon County there were many social clubs. Other groups would put on a pie supper auction.

We had different names for them back then; it was according to where they were held. If it was held at a house with dancing before the auction, it would be called a Shindig. If it was held at a big barn, it would be called a Hoe-down and auction. Sometimes a pie supper would be held at a church, and you would have a short sermon, (about two hours on giving to the Lord) before the auction. A Hoe-Down drew more people than the others.

The Hoe-Down had a built-in nursery for the kids about five and under. The kids that were six to about ten usually sat on the top part of the stacked baled hay. Then the ten to fifteen years of age would sit off to the side about middle ways down, where they could flirt with one another. No pipe or roll-your-own smoking was allowed because they were afraid the hay would catch on fire. But there was a spot just outside of the big opening of the doors that was cleaned off for that purpose.

Now let me tell you about that built-in nursery. It was the hay loft that covered half of the bottom floor. It would have a pull down ladder that mothers would take their children up and make them straw beds. An older girl would sit by the open edge and make sure we behaved.

If a girl was sixteen, she could bake a pie. Pies had to be made from scratch. The women whose pie that had sold for the most money was as proud as a person who had won the lottery nowadays. Now, there was something that we did learn at a very young age. That upper loft had some purty big cracks in the floor. You could wipe the hay back a little and look down on what was going on under us. Another thing was that some of that loose hay must have grown around acorn trees, because there would be plenty of acorns in it. As I found the crack that I liked, next to it would be where my bed would be.

Now I was much more mature than most kids my age, because my Daddy and brother that was always trying to make me cry, made me that way. The sound of the chattering was lowering as the music started to play. I gave it about a couple of minutes and lowered my face to look through the crack. It was awful what I seen. I seen a man holding a woman, and they were moving around. You would not believe it, that other kid's next meal was about six inches from another man's chest.

I was already weaned and was I glad. Mom smashed those taters up for me, and I eat like a big boy. They would give me the cob after they had eaten the corn off the corn. And I would suck all the cobs.

One thing I will have to credit my Dad for, he started his boys early in life to be thinkers. Well, I figured I knew how to break up some of this awful stuff going on downstairs. I gathered me some small acorns and put by my crack. When a couple came around that I thought was too close, I would drop an acorn in between them. They would stop and look to see what dropped down. Since it wasn't a spider or something like that, they continued until the music stopped. My Mom wasn't a dancer but my Dad loved to dance a lot. When he came by I would drop a little loose hay through the crack.

The dancing would be over, and the auction of the pie would begin. Men knew what women were good cooks. If they bought a woman's pie, it would be eaten with him and her husband ifn he wasn't able to buy one.

Pie Supper Auction

The young women had a hard time competing because the mother would give her no help at all according to the rules. They sometimes got things mixed up, like salt instead of sugar, and their pies would not bring much over 25-50 cents.

By 9 or 9:30, everything was over and we were headed home. I would smile at where one of those acorns landed. But it was her fault. She should have had on a higher neck dress. If that dance didn't last long she had to find a dark place to get that acorn out of where she didn't want it.

THE PREACHERS DAUGHTER IS NOT THE SAME PREACHER ABOVE

Every Sunday kids would invite you, or you them, to come home with them and eat dinner and play and come back to church that night. The preacher's daughter had two very big strong brothers. They could lay on the ground under the back of a pickup and lift the rear tires off the ground. Some of the girls in the olden days at 11 and 12 years of age were well endowed in front.

After dinner she asked me, "Would you like to go out to the barn and take a ride on the horse?"

Hardly anyone had a saddle, people would put a feed bag on the horses back and set on it. This is when my trouble began. We were riding down a long lane from her house to the main road. I was riding in back and touching her hips very lightly and proper in order to keep my balance on the horse's back. All of the sudden the horse reared up and I reached with both hands around her trying to get a hold of the horses mane. I missed and I grabbed her to keep from falling off, but it was high and in the wrong place.

As soon as the horse's two front feet were on the ground, she turned around and with her fist knocked me off the back of the horse. I hit the ground laughing my heart out. I couldn't help it.

I told her brother about it so he would not hurt me and he said, "Aye that's alright. I think that is Ma's old bra and she has it full of cloth and cotton."

She didn't want to play with me the rest of the day as I tried to explain to her that it was an accident.

PERSIMMON TREES

As a kid, some small trees would bloom out with a beautiful white blossom. No, it wasn't a dogwood tree. It would be a persimmon tree. This tree would be important to all the family in the olden days because it was used in so many different ways.

After the tree would bloom, the green persimmons would come on it. But don't try to eat one of those yet, because they were very bitter when green. Slowly they would turn a golden yellow and be a little soft. Now was when the fun began. Bear in mind that a persimmon tree produced more than something good to eat. Mom would sometimes keep a bowl of them on the table for us boys to snack on.

Mom would use the trees close to the house for canning. She made jelly. We had persimmon jelly, blackberry jelly, strawberry jelly and others in the fruit cellar all year long. They were good to put in one of Mom's big hot biscuits.

The value of a persimmon tree was more than just having them to eat though. They also put meat on the table. We would go from tree to tree. Possum (I know but that is the way I spell it), coon and deer would gather around and eat the persimmons, so we always had meat on the table. My Dad would not want us to shoot a deer and Mom would mourn if a dove was killed, so those two animals were off limits to us.

The persimmon tree also allowed us kids to have some good entertainment. Each of us would go out and cut a long slender stick that would whip good on top. A lot of the trees were on fence lines. Half would get on one side of the fence and half on the other side of the fence with the persimmon tree on the fence line. We would gather a pile of persimmons and put them on the end of a long stick. We would whip them in the air to try and hit someone on the other side of the fence. We always pulled the shirt off if we had one on, in order not to ruin it. We were fortunate to have a couple changes of clothes, but some kids wasn't. Some even had to cover up in bed while their Moms washed the only clothes they had.

I have heard people say, "The good Lord made sweet tator's to eat with our possum." I have also heard that people would make the statement, "That possum has a good flavor, it must have come from a persimmon tree."

The most joyful days of my life was as a kid raised in Oregon County. We might have had it bad, but we didn't know it. We never had a time when us kids could not eat all we wanted and our roof did not leak.

I AM NOT TAKING THAT THING HOME FOR MY MOM TO WASH

Back in 1950, things started to happen to me that I did not understand. Bear in mind that I wasn't dumb by any means. I was just a farm boy who learned to play the game of basketball with two Folger coffee cans wedged together like a ball and an iron hub off of the old wooden wagon wheel. The goal was smaller than a goal in the gym. When I finished the eighth grade, I was a man all 6 ft. 1 in. I worked hard like a man and saved every nickel I could.

Winter time was here, and it was time to play basketball. I played a half of the game with the B team varsity and was a sub on the A team and got to play very little with them. The bleachers at the old Alton High school gym was the wall between the hallway and the gym. When we played games, the bleachers would let down in the hallway and would be full.

About half way through my freshman year, I was in the locker room with the rest of the players. I had pulled my pants off to put on my trunks and the shirt with number 33 on it. I was putting on my warm up trunks and jacket that we warmed up in when I noticed the coach looking at me. I was hoping he was thinking about starting me and let me play the first half. I had already played the first half on the B team. You were only allowed to play four quarters. That wasn't it at all. He asked me if I still had my underwear on and I told him I did. He told me to get a little piece of cloth covering the privates that had straps that you put each leg in and a waistband.

He told me that Hardin Franks Hardware carried them for the players. He handed me an empty box for me to look at so I would get the right thing, and he also said "Get a large."

The large had a big black L on the end of the box. The name on the box was "Bicycle." This was something that was going to be hard for me to do, not because of money but because I was very bashful unless I was greeting people at the grocery store where I worked. I almost had to force myself to go in and ask for one of those little things, but I did. I bravely walked in, and Mr. Franks greeted me and I told him I wanted to buy a large bicycle, and it needed to be

white. Mr. Franks said, "I have the large ones, but most of them are red and a few blue ones."

He said, "Come on back here where they are, and I will show you those; you might like them."

As I looked at those riding bicycles, I wanted to run, but I had to have one to play basketball in. I was going to tell him what I was talking about. I told him I did not want a riding bicycle; I wanted that little piece of stretch cloth that covered your privates.

He gave a big smile and said, "Oh, you want an athletic supporter."

He reached under the counter and yep; that was it, with a big L on top of the end of the box. I asked him how much I owed him, and he said, "Not a thing."

If I had known they were free, I should have got two of them. I kept it hid when I got home because I did not want Mom to see it until I could get it to school the next day.

Mom had never seen any basketball game in her life. She might have thought that might have been part of the uniform. I very quickly learned you had to wash them after every game or you would have jock burns. After each game as I showered, I washed what we called jockey straps and left them in my locker to dry. I wasn't about to take that little piece of stretch cloth home for Mom to wash. I wore them but never seen much use for them, because before if I got hit between the legs, I would just grab it for a second and keep going.

No Sirree, Mom would not have understood and I was not about trying to explain it to her.

SPIT BATHS

I always wondered as a boy on the farm in Oregon County, why my heels and ears got what they called "rusty." This just might have been a saying in our family, but I think a lot of people in Oregon County can relate to it.

The city girls that my older brothers had married would come to Oregon County and would ask me a lot of questions on how we did things. I would give them instructions on how to do certain things. One would say, "You don't have running water, so how do I wash my face and hands?"

I would take them in the section of the kitchen where Mom did the cooking and just inside the door was a wash pan and water bucket. The water bucket had two dippers, one in the bucket and another one hanging on a nail on the wall behind the water bucket. While I was here, I wanted to give them a warning to not drink from the dipper hanging on the wall. They had to dip a drink of water from the dipper in the bucket. The dipper on the wall was my Dad's dipper. He had T.B. and we could not drink with the same dipper he used.

Then I continued as the woman had a look of fear in her eyes as I would point out the wash pan and lye soap. I would give her another warning that her skin was softer than ours and I hoped the lye soap did not burn it. I continued saying if there is water in the wash pan and it looked dirty, just take it to the back door and throw it out. Then she could come to come to the stove and raise the heavy lid on the right side and dip out some warm water in the pan to wash your face and hands. One remarked, "You mean your drinking water bucket is setting next to the wash pan?"

My answer would be "Yep, if you don't drink all you have in the dipper, just pour it in the wash pan, It will be good water to wash our hands and face in."

A spit bath was when you take a washcloth, soap it down with the lye soap, and wash yourself with it. I did not make it any easier on her by telling her to look in the dipper to see if any little black wigley things were in there. If there was, you had to blow them back or not try to drink them. She would not look any less worried than she did before I told her that.

Then came the question I was trying to avoid, "Where do you take your bath in the mornings?"

I had to tell her we did not take a daily bath like she was used too; we took "spit baths" some days. On Saturday before we go to town, we would try to unhook a section of pipe that ran from the house to carry the water to the cistern. We tried to do this each time it rained until the tub was full. We like for it to set for a day so we don't have to take a bucket of hot water out of Mom's cook stove reservoir to warm it up. We have a big old brush out there and the dirtiest parts of the body would be the ears and heels of the feet.

That's what Mom says, "Your ears and heels are rusty. That is what the brush is for." She looked at the rusty roof and would say, "That where your water comes from?"

My brother would then say jokingly, "Yes, that makes me a real lover boy when we come home."

"How can you be private out here?" she asked.

"Well, we have worn out cut-offs that we put on when we get into the tub. The youngest gets the bath first and then on up in age. By the time the oldest one got in the tub, it might be hard to see the bottom," my brother explained.

"Is this healthy?" She asked.

"I don't know, but if we get sick, Mom doctors us and, we have all been pretty healthy," he explained.

THEY WERE FASTER THAN A SPEEDING BULLET-ABLE TO JUMP OVER SCHOOL DECK FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER. IS IT A PLANE OR IS IT A BIRD? NO, IT'S HEAD LICE.

Many today might not know what you meant if you used the word "nits or cooties." I am talking about head lice eggs. If you went to grade school in Oregon County, let's be honest, you probably took home a note from your teacher that there was head lice in the class and please treat for them.

Many people in the olden days believed they were caused by filth, but that is not so. They mostly started in girl's hair that was not combed often enough. As a child, I have sat behind girls with poor grooming on the hair and see what I thought might be cooties.

When we brought a note home, Mom would check our heads and change all the bed linens. Whether she found any lice or not, she would start the treatment. Two types of treatment were used by my Mother. One would be called the smother treatment, where she would coat our heads with a Vaseline and Mayonnaise mixture. Another treatment was a blue mixture of some kind that I can't remember the name of.

The nits or cooties would be a small brown spot on the skin, which would turn yellowish before it hatched. These eggs would hatch every six to ten days, so it took more than one treatment to be sure you got the cooties.

If one kid in the class had head lice, all would have them if you weren't treated. Most of the time Mom would not find hatched lice but still had to treat. She would use alcohol in the mixture to try and kill the cooties.

The second treatment was usually done on the 9th or 10th day. Have you tried to get that Mayonnaise out of hair? It's a mess.

Girls didn't comb their hair as much in the olden days as they do today. That was one of the reasons we had cooties. It had nothing to do with filth as people thought back then. It had more to do with how much you combed your hair. You could also catch them from someone's hat or coat by hanging yours next to theirs.

Yes, we would usually in our minds say, "It came from that little poor girl, whose hair would not be groomed each day."

We didn't like to admit that we had caught head lice back then and probably, not many will admit it today.

STIFF DRINK WITHOUT A HIDDEN STILL

My Dad told me this story, maybe 70 years ago.

Somehow or someway, he could make beer in a pressure cooker. The last batch he made, the pressure was too much and it blew the lid off the cooker through the kitchen ceiling. It would have went through the tin roof if it hadn't hit a good two by four.

My Dad stopped drinking in about 1925, for two reasons. He played baseball on what they called a town team. They played in bib overhauls and with no gloves. The players were there to put on a show. Each player had two positions to play at different times. The pitcher would cover first base if no one was on first base. If a runner was on first, the second baseman would play close to first, and the third baseman would cover second and short shop. The catcher had a glove and would cover third at times. My Dad played center field and right field, and the other fielder would play center field and left field. Both fielders wore a large back pocket that ran from front pocket on the left side around the back to the pocket on the right side, and that's how they caught fly balls. The two fielders had padding under the pocket. There would be six players, playing a nine player town team.

All six of the players were good with the bat, and the pitcher was good, so the town teams didn't get many runs. The team would travel in a pick up with the players setting in the back. I don't remember how much he said they made per game, but it wasn't much.

After a game sometimes they would all chip in a little money and buy a bottle to pass around while riding in the back of the truck.

When they were bringing my Dad home, Mom seen them coming up the lane and was out there when they stopped. She reached in and grabbed the back of his collar and pulled him out of the truck and placed an 18" round stick of fireplace wood between his shoulder blades. That one-minute rehab worked because he never drank again.

He said some of the men that drank would buy a sliced loaf of store bought bread, (we called it light bread), and pour alcohol through the bread to make their own whisky, but I couldn't tell you how they did this either.

WHISTLING MAY BE A LOST ART

In Oregon County as a kid, almost everyone whistled. Some were better than others in their whistling in a place where others could hear them. But usually only two or three people would hear you at a time because people whistled for their own entertainment. People who were worried about putting food on the table whistled to make the thought feel better. People who were not feeling so well whistled to forget the illness. People who were happy whistled because they liked to hear themselves. A person sitting in the rocking chair on the front porch might whistle, just because he wanted too.

I haven't tried to whistle in years, and I decided to go sit in the rocker like Dad use to, when I was a kid on the farm in Oregon County. I licked my lips with my tongue and remembered well how to pucker my lips. I was going nuts trying to get that whistle to come out of my mouth like it used to, but old age and not using the whistle for such a long time, I had lost it.Then I started thinking how much fun it was in the evening time, setting on the edge of the front porch, whistling like Bob White quail and them answering me back. Each return whistle that they answered back would be closer than the one before.

I can remember whistling: "The Old gray Mare ain't what She Use to be", "She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain", "Boil Em Cabbage Down", "Rubber Dolly", and other songs. "On The Wings Of A Dove", was one of my favorites. Whistling and whittling went together real well. Most people did a lot of whistling while whittling.

If I asked my grandkids if they like to whistle, I get answers like, I got one at home. I'd ask, "That's not what I mean, do you like to whistle?"

The kid answered, "If I am playing basketball. When the referee blows the whistle, it's bad news, and also in football."

I give up. We used whistling as a means of communicating with each other also back in Oregon County. If us boys were a distance away or Dad wanted to get our attention, he would put two fingers to the lips and give a loud whistle. It was also a dog language that our dogs understood.

I never could put two fingers up to my lips and make that loud whistle, but I'd rather you not tell anyone because even girls could do it. Another communication was when a boy seen a pretty girl sometimes, he would whistle at her. She knew what it meant. You could see her body straighten up with pride.

Has whistling a song become a thing of the past? Like a lot of things being in the past in the last few years. About the only thing these old lips are good for anymore is to cover up my false teeth, but they still like to kiss.

HOG KILLIN IN THE OZARKS

Hogs were our prime source of meat. After the first frost in November, Dad would move the rack that would hold up a 55 gallon drum at an angle where it could be filled only half full of water to the side of the pond. He would get ready to build a big fire under the drum and bring the water to a boil.

Most parts of the hog could be used. The hog fat, Mom would make into lard. A hog would not be butchered unless there was a full moon. Mom would be getting the old iron kettle with four small legs on it ready for the fire.

When it come time to kill the hog, Dad would take a sharp knife and kill it by cutting the left side of its throat, about three inches behind the jaw bone, or striking it between the eyes with an ax head. Dad would never shoot a hog in the head to kill it because he thought it might poison the brain. The brain was eaten at breakfast cooked in scrambled eggs.

We would let the hog bleed out, then put its head first down in the boiling water for a short period of time. Then we would scrape it with a dull knife or a piece of glass. You had to be sure all of the hair got wet. The hog would be dipped the second time, and any hair left from the first scraping would be scraped off.

We had two heavy posts placed far enough apart that the hog would hang without its nose touching the ground. A rod heavy enough to hold the hog up would be run through the hamstrings of the hogs back legs and placed on the

posts. The hog would be gutted by cutting from the crotch down to his head. The dogs would be smiling, dreaming of a big meal.

Mom would make cracklings out of the hide. The head meat (called Souse) would be made into head cheese. Mom had a table grinder that she could make enough sausage for about three weeks, (any more than that might ruin, no freezer). Some people would rent a locker at Simmons Ice in Alton to store their meat, but we didn't have extra money for that.

We had what most farms had, a smoke house. The meat would be salted down (I should say rubbed down with salt) and hung on hooks in the smoke house. Mom would go out each evening and cut the meat she would need for the next day.

It would set in water overnight, and as much salt rubbed off as possible or it would be too salty to eat. Mom would slice it and serve it like Bacon, but it was really salt pork. This made the best bean meat you could ask for.

Also, Mom made a years supply of lye soap at this time. It was used to bathe, wash clothes, and anything bar soap would be used for. Some of the city people would break out or get red skin because their skin wasn't used to good lye soap.

MAKING PONDS AS A KID IN OREGON COUNTY

Dad decided he needed a pond in the pasture between the house and the highway for the cows when he put them on that side to graze. Most years we did not let them on that side because there would be plenty of grazing on the other half. We would bale hay off the side they were not on, but some years there would be a drought, and he would open it up for extra grazing.

I had seen and wondered what that big scoop was that had big teeth sticking out of the sharp edge that was tilted very little on the front. On the back it had two large steel handles, where it was like a scoop on a tractor. There was also a big steel place on each side with hooks on each side.

The day came that I was going to see how this big thing worked. My older brothers and Dad were not so glad to see this day come because of the hard work that had to be done to dig a pond. Dad harnessed both horses up, just like he would if we were going someplace in the wagon. The bucket was like a bucket that people use to scoop dirt on the front of a tractor today.

This was one of only a few jobs that I couldn't help on. It took two people, one to direct the horses with long reins, (which was Dad) and one to control the big handles on the bucket. Many times two of my older brothers would team up and one get on each handle. This was a safer way because with one on the handles, sometimes they would lunge forward unexpectedly and throw the one on the handle over into the horse's rear.

The first several runs was skimming the ground about an inch each way making kind of a circle. Dad would holler "Dump," and the handles would go forward. The bucket would be upside down, but he would not holler "Dump" until just before he was going to stop the horses. Then it would easily dump itsself .

The bucket would stay upside down until Dad drug it to where he wanted to make the next load. He would drag just about a foot from where he dragged the last round to keep the banks even all way around. The dirt got easier the deeper he went, but the loads would be heavier for the horses to pull the scoop up the bank. After about eight foot, he would then have the scoop and horses in the hole going around in circles and emptying where ever the bank wasn't level.

After the hole was prepared like Dad wanted it, the scoop would be pulled upside down and run around the outsides of the bank to make a big level spot around the top on the bank. The bank was slanted outside towards the field so the cattle could get to the water.

Nope. It's not a pond yet. A temporary fence needed to be put around it. Then a trip was made to the river to fill some 55 gallon barrels with water to put in the pond. After the water had been poured into the new pond, it left a muddy bottom. That's when you went and got four hogs or so, and they would wallow in it for a few days. Then they were taken out. We waited on a hard rain. When it came, the fence would be taken down, and the cows had water.

No, big motors, just two horse power scoops.

Comments:
Another way to settle clay pond bottoms was to put in some straw and let cattle tromp it down. The horse drawn implement to move dirt was called a slip. Some people worked three abreast if the soil was loose and easy to scoop. That made for heavier loads. The danger with a slip was if the front edge hit a rock, it would flip the handles up. The railroad through Oregon County was built with slips that was the only thing they had before bulldozers. Max H. Evans.

THE BIG GREEN LIZARD AND CHRISTMAS IN OREGON COUNTY

It was December, and I had a chance to take my daughter and wife home to Oregon County. We were going to be at my parent's house Thursday, Friday, Saturday Christmas day and drive back to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where we lived on Sunday.

My wife was raised in Oregon County, and I had forgotten that Oregon County had a city girl also, and I married one of them.

Back then, you could take the turnpike to Joplin and then you traveled on asphalt two-lane roads and did not go through Springfield. We was almost home; we were in Pomona, Missouri where I would take a short cut and come into Alton missing West Plains. Just as I turned the corner in Pomona, my car would not go, even though the motor was running. We were in front of a house with a building that look like a garage beside it. I went to the door and asked if there was any place I could get my car fixed.

The man asked, "What's wrong with your car?" And when I told him what it did he said, "You got a broke timing chain." He said, "Youns go into the kitchen, and the little woman will feed youns. I will call my brother who works with me and have him to pick up the part in West Plains. We will have you on the road again in about two hours."

He went out to get everything ready for the part so that he and his brother could put it in or on, (I had never heard of one before) when his brother got there.

The "little woman" was his wife. She insisted that we sit down at the table and eat. They had already eaten. The table had some mighty good looking grub on it, so we had a wonderful meal. All the time I was wondering how much this was going to cost, because I had less than a hundred dollars on me.

In about two hours, he came in and said, "You are ready to roll."

I asked him how much I owed him, he said, "$27 orta do it, boy those parts are getting high."

He then wanted us to have a cup of coffee with him, and I told him we were late and needed to get on to Alton. That didn't seem to stop him from saying, "Ya know you passed a house between here and Willer Spring that two ladies moved into. They come in the other day, and I jest asked them if they were kin and one said, Kinda."

I thought " Now how can you be kinda kin; you're either kin or not kin atall. Well, I guess it will all come out in the wash."

I thanked little lady for the meal, and he kept talking, he said, "Those two ladies have gooses, have you ever eat a goose egg?"

By this time I was in the car and he was standing at the door still talking, giving me direction on how to get to Alton, which I already knew. He finally said, "Youns have a big Christmas. We don't do much of that stuff ourselves."

I was moving the car slowly, and he was still talking and I interrupted him and said we have to go, and I drove off.

When we got home, my folks were already in bed. Mom opened the door in her long flannel nightgown and said, "Harris put your stuff in that bedroom; we don't use it anymore, just save it for you kids when you come home."

My wife looks at Mom and said, " This is Bill and not Harris."

Mom said, "I'm always getting boys names mixed up."

Dad put extra wood on the fire and said, "This is going to be a cold one tonight."

My oldest daughter was about six and wanted to know where the Christmas tree was. I explained to her that they didn't put a Christmas tree up. We would go into the woods and cut us one Christmas Eve. She then said, "Daddy, I need to use the bathroom before I go to bed, where is it?"

My Mom answered that question fast and said, "It is behind the yard fence outside. But there is a granite bucket with a lid on it under the bed, and that's what you can use."

My daughter did and so did my wife, and I went outside. Mom reminded me of when I was at home I would wee wee off the front porch and kill her flowers, and she spanked me for it one time. When we got to the bed, Mom's quilts weighed about 5 pounds each, and you would have three or four on the bed. It was a job to get into bed under the weight of those quilts. My daughter said, "Daddy I can't move."

I said, "Just lay still, and these will keep us warm." I slept next to the wall of the bed, my wife was in the middle, and my daughter was on the outside. In

the night, she had scooted and pulled the quilts towards the middle of the bed leaving the side open next to the mattress.

At daylight, each morning Dad would be stoking the coals in the stove, and putting wood in the big pot-bellied stove to get the house warm. If we had not had those heavy quilts, we would have been cold also.

The next morning I heard my Dad working with the fire and complaining because the water had frozen in the two gallon water bucket where we had drunk. All at once, I heard the loudest scream I had ever heard a six-year-old make, and she moved those quilts like they did not weigh anything and was out of bed screaming. My wife and I jumped out of bed and asked her what was the matter.

She screamed, " A big green thing is trying to get me!"

I looked at the side she had taken the quilts off of, and there was a big green long tail lizard. I picked it up, and it was stiff, and I was thinking, what was Mom and Dad doing with a plastic lizard in that bed. After looking closer, I could see it was a real lizard frozen stiff.

I showed it to dad and he said, "Ah, just throw it out in the yard, the dogs will eat it when it thaws out."

After a big breakfast and hearing some griping about that white granite bucket under the bed, we heard a horn blowing down on the highway. There were about three inches of snow on the ground, and Dad went out and waved at the mailman. There was something laying in the snow. (When I was young, the mailman did other things for people as well as carrying the mail. He delivered messages from one family to another. If one family had something to give to another family; he would drop it off for them). Dad asked if I would walk down the lane to the mailbox and get the mail and whatever that was on the snow beside the mailbox. As I got close to the mailbox, I could see it was something big wrapped in white paper that was bloody. I checked the box, and there was no mail, (didn't get much mail in those days unless it was a Wards catalog). I picked the bloody white paper up, and it had something in it that must to have weighed five or six pounds. When I got it to the house Mom was overjoyed.

She said, "Oh look Min, one of the neighbors down the road has dressed out a nice coon to give us for Christmas!"

To make a long story shorter, we went out and cut a small tree and put colored paper chains on it like we did when I was my daughter's age. I am not

for sure, but I think that might have been one of her most enjoyable Christmases.

Mom already had baked chicken planned for Christmas dinner so we didn't have the coon, and I think she wanted to save it for a special treat for herself. The only gifts under the tree were the ones we brought, because back home if one of the older kids sent a Christmas gift, we opened them as soon as we got them. Christmas was a sock with holes in the heel, and you put another sock in it to cover up the hole. There would be an apple, orange, hard ribbon candy, and a fire cracker.

What a good Christmas we had in Oregon County. Even my little six-year-old liked the granite pot after using it. My wife would say, "You don't need to go to the bathroom; you just set on that granite pot."

OUR SATURDAYS IN OREGON COUNTY AS A YOUNG BOY

It was a beautiful Saturday morning on my little farm. My knees were scratched and swollen from Thursday and Fridays' work in the flower beds. I was setting here on the front porch drinking a cup of coffee, thinking what I could do today. Many men meet their friends and drink some beer on Saturday, but I don't drink. Many others are swinging a golf club and cursing the ball. When it's not the ball's fault, it's going just where they hit it. But I don't play golf, so I'm sitting in the rocking chair thinking and drinking my coffee, knowing that is their hobby and what they like to do. So I decided I would also enjoy my hobby. I guess I am lucky, I have two hobbies and some of the others also do. For example, a man might set in his golf cart riding to the ball with a beer in the golf cart holder.

My two hobbies are, writing and reading and writing devotions on what I have read in the Bible. I am kinda addicted to these hobbies and usually do them before bedtime at night, but today is a beautiful day, so I decided I wanted to enjoy it now. Thinking back to my childhood days in Oregon County, I remembered what Saturdays were like.

Saturday started at 5 A.M. when Mom had breakfast on the table. There would be eggs that the hens had laid the day before. In the middle of the long table would be a big bowl of gravy, without lumps. My Dad didn't want it to have

lumps in it and there wasn't. There was also a big platter of biscuits, butter that Mom had molded in her wooden mold to make it look better, a plate of salt pork, a plate of taters, and a plate of tomators if it was in season. Dad and Mom would have hot coffee in a cup setting on a saucer. The kids would drink milk. Dad would pour some of the coffee in the saucer and blow over it to cool it a little and drink from the saucer.

Mom worked hard with little credit, because there were so many of us. If we all reached out our hands to the middle of the table at the same time, you might not be able to see the top of the table. Saturday at 6 A.M., we headed our bare feet to the porch and stuck them into a pair of buckle up rubber overshoes because it was time to head to the milk lot and milk the cows. After milking, we poured the two gallon water buckets of milk in a milk can. Then we sat the milk can in a washtub of water and stirred it until it was cool. The milkman would come by and pick it up in his milk truck and take it to Thayer.

It was now about 7:30 on our farm outside of Alton. It was time to go to the smokehouse and get the 7 ft. crosscut saw and walk across the field to the woods. We would follow Dad and he would mark the trees he wanted sawed down and cut up into heating wood. The crosscut saw did well in cutting the trees down, and one of the boys would trim the limbs off the tree while two others started sawing it into heating wood.

This was when the trouble started. Our crosscut saw had a straight handle on both ends. One person on one side would pull the saw through the wood and then the person on the other side would pull it back through the wood. Dad would always sharpen the teeth on it where it would cut through the wood easy. Everyone knew his job and what he would be doing every Saturday. The middle age boys would do the trimming off the limbs and when they finished that, we would come back to the big part of the tree and start splitting. The youngest and the oldest handled the crosscut saw. After sawing for awhile, one would start riding the saw, and the other would come around and say, "You're riding the saw, and it is killing me."

Riding the saw meant that one was pushing down on the handle while the other one was trying to pull it back through, There were often some pushing and shoving going on for riding the saw.

At 11 A.M. we were out of the woods headed towards the house thinking about what Mom had fixed for dinner, but we didn't eat until 12 o'clock at noon. When we arrived at the house, there would be a 10 ft. high pile of slabs that the saw mill had delivered for $15, with a few big pieces of a tree that looked like stumps. They had a double edge stuck in each one of them.

We split the slabs as wood for Mom's cooking stove. The slabs were very easy to split. We would split enough for Mom to cook on the next week. At 12 o'clock, Mom walked out on the porch and hollerd, " Dinner is ready." We all headed towards the table.

After eating we stripped and headed out where the big tub of water was with the lye soap lying beside it and scrubbed ourselves down. The rest of the week we took what we called spit baths. When we got our clothes on, it was time to go to Alton. Dad would reach into his pocket and give each one of us a nickel to spend. When we got to Alton Dad would set on the courthouse square and chew the fat with other men.

The women did the shopping and took their time doing it because they were trading recipes how to cook different things. When Mom had gotten what she needed (and other women were the same way), she would go to the check out, and would reach into her bra and pull out cash to pay for it. (I did say needed and not wanted).

We kids squeezed our nickel, hunted, and did serious thinking. Now I could buy a big ice cream cone, but it would be gone in a few minutes. But it would be good. The other item was a big bundle of black licorice, which I didn't like real well but there was enough take some home and have it for a few days. Licorice usually won. After two hours or so Mom would walk over to the square setting places, and it would be time to go home and milk.

After the chores were done, we had supper that was leftovers from dinner and two big pans of corn bread that we crumbled up in our milk and ate with a spoon. Then everyone went to the living room, and the old big battery radio would turn on to listen to Gabriel Heater to see what was going on in the world. Grand Ol' Opry was a big thrill, and we would sing along with them. I thought that Lum and Abner was funny. The Screeching Door was scary and then it was time for bed.

That's how we spent our Saturdays in Oregon County.

SATURDAY NIGHTS WHERE SPECIAL AT OUR FARM IN OREGON COUNTY

After a Saturday Evening of sitting on the ledge that ran around the Alton courthouse, we would get home in time to milk and feed before dark. We had a big rounded top type radio that set next to Dad's chair. Through the week, we would get to listen to Gable Heater, KWTO in Springfield for the weather forecast,

and that was about it. We kids wasn't allowed to turn the radio on because it ran off a big battery and Dad didn't want to run it down. He would let us listen to the Lone Ranger from time to time.

Saturday nights were different. We kids would set in the floor around close to the radio with our Dad in the chair beside the radio. The programs that we heard seemed to be timed out just right: Lum and Abner, the Screeching Door, and of course the Grand Ole Opry. The Solmun Judge and Bashful Aswal was two favorites. Prince Albert smoking tobacco was one of the main sponsors.

Lum and Abner owned the Jotem Down store in Arkansas. There was something real special about Amos and Andy. It was all fun except the Screeching Door, and it was scary. But we had to listen to the program. I can still feel the cool breeze coming through the open window and the Solmun Judge saying, "Ya Ha Ha, Prince Albert."

If Joe Louis had a boxing match, you could forget about everything else because my Dad was a Joe Louis fan. As the family set in the dim lit room, with no one talking, but all contented with what they were hearing on that big box, it was a real family time together.

Another thing about Saturday nights was that we didn't go to bed at dark. We lit the lamp and stayed up as late as 9 o'clock or so.

No, I don't think of these as hard times, I think of them as good memories of Oregon County. Where kids had to get permission to do certain things, and the answer was often, "No."

Birthdays weren't recognized that much back then. My cousin asked his Dad, "What month and day was I born?"

His dad told him he was born during peach drying time.

DAD TOOK ME ON A TOUR OF THE FUTURE: THE BIGGEST BUILDING IN THE WORLD

My Dad told me one time I was like a cow standing in a field that had grass up to her knees, and trying to get through the fence where there was no grass.

I wondered about a lot of things when I was a six or seven-year-old boy in Oregon County. I had to know if'n I didn't know. Just like the court house in Alton, I had to know how they could build a three story building I was thinking,

I'll betcha they didn't use ladders like we made at home. They ain't enough lumber in the world to get up there and fix it, if'n sumptin went wrong. Before Dad set down to get all the information that was passed around setting on the courthouse square, I insisted he take me up all three floors of the court house.

As we entered the first floor he was telling me, "Youse going to see things we don't have at home in here and I will try and explain them to you." As we got on the inside he said, "See that square metal box over there? That's where people drink, would you like to have a drink of water?"

He lifted me up to the top of it and I pushed down on the button he told me too, and water sperted up on my face. That was fun to me, but I didn't try it again, because the box was only about four foot tall and not very wide. I knew they would have to fill it up again if I let it run too long.

"See those doors over there?" We walked up to them and he pointed at a word on the door. "You see this word, it say's men, MEN." Then he turned to the other door and pointed at the same kind of sign, and said, "See this word? It spells women, WOMEN."

I was thinkin that those must be spelling rooms for people who wanted to learn to spell, but I didn't get to think long, as he said, "Men cannot go into this room. They go into the other room. Now just remember the one with the most words in it, you don't go into."

We were now inside and he said, "Do you need to use the bathroom?"

I can't believe what he did! He walked us to a thing that was stuck on the wall and unzipped his pants and took, well you know what. That thing would have made a good horse watering trough at home, we coulda nailed it to one of the strong fence posts.

Then sumptin really strange happened. He reached up and pushed down on a little handle and water came out the top! I didn't try it because I didn't see the water box anywhere. He then walked over to another thing stuck on the wall that was bowl shaped, and had two handles. He turned one of them and water came out. He washed his hands. He said, "You should always wash your hands after you take a, (well you know what)."

I told him I never got my hands wet when I wee wee, and I used the woods for that.

He then walked over and opened the door to a small room and said, "This is the same thing as using the outhouse, only here you push down on that small handle pointing to the side"

At least I could see where the water comes from on this thing, but I betcha they had to fill it up a lot. As we continued he would say, "That's where they keep records."

All the people in the rooms were dressed in their Sunday best clothes. The only thing that bothered me was, I looked close and I didn't see a record one in that room. We walked up the two flights of stairs to the second floor and that worried me a little, because we were only going up one floor and had to walk two stair ways.

As we reached the second floor my dad said, "I hope you never have to come up here."

I asked, "Why?"

"That big room right over there is where when a person gets into trouble, a wealthy lawyer will bring them in, and try to make a judge think they didn't do anything. But there is another wealthy lawyer setting at another desk saying, he or she done it. The rooms around the big room, is where those rich lawyers talk to each other and try to make a deal."

When we reached the third floor we stopped and Dad looked down at me and said, "This is where bad people are put behind bars. You bear in mind, if'n you do anything to be behind bars on this third floor, I will tell you just like I have the other kids, "Your name won't be Combs anymore."

We were so high up in the air, I even thought I might feel dizzy. That must have been the biggest building in the world.

CALL IT WHAT YOU LIKE, BUT THAT WAS THE FARM FAMILY OF 1940's.

This writing deals with different friendships among the farm families and how all of them had strong friendships. There seem to be two or three type of friendships.

First of all there was the friendship that would meet around the Alton square on Saturday afternoons. These were friends that usually did not go to the same church that they went to, and would talk about what was happening on the other side of the hill. It was a friendship that was looked forward to on Saturday afternoon, because that would be the only time they would get to visit.

Then you would find the good ole boy friendship that would fix something broke, coming to the square to do it. He was well liked and would do something for a person and then ask, "Is 50 cents too much?

Then the most solid friendships were people who attended the same church. Now these people you would not be seen visiting so much around the square because they wanted to find out what was happening in other places. You could visit one another at church. As best as I can remember, most all families went to church. If the church wasn't having dinner on the ground, several families would take turns in inviting another family or two home after church for Sunday dinner. This would be real fellowship for the men while waiting on the women to get the meal on the table. When dinner was ready to eat, the grownups would take their place at the dinner table. But the kids would play out on the porch until after the grown ups finished eating and talking.

Now let me break here and say, "Little Jimmy Dickens knew what I am talking about, when he sang, "Mama said, Jim, take an old tater and wait.""

Did we cry? No, that was just a part of life where the adults got to eat and fellowship. It was a fun time of knowing what Mom had prepared and wondering what parts of the chickens would be left. It was also a time when two brothers older than myself could tell a story of how it used to be when they were my age. He said he didn't know a chicken had anything but wings until he was older. Then he would continue to tell a story.

I heard a story about a man over somewhere that was breeding a new kind of chicken with five legs and was doing purty good at producing them. But he had one problem. The story goes a chicken buyer stopped and asked him if all the legs tasted like regular chicken legs.

The old boy took his hat off and rubbed his head a little and said, "I rightly don't know, I've never been able to catch one of them."

This was not very funny to anyone except him. The men would start coming out of the house, and Mom would say, "Youngins, come on and eat now." What a meal we had with friends, my brothers, and visitors. We had plenty to eat and a full stomach.

If it was cruel to feed the children last, we did not know it. We were raised like Little Jimmy, "Take an old cold tater and wait."

OUR SECOND HOME AT HOME

My Dad was as much afraid of a storm than anything I know that you could be afraid of. My Dad was a believer that if the wind come from the south three days in a row that we were going to have heavy rains and storms.

A loud thunder and lightning in the middle of the night and Dad would direct everyone to the fruit cellar where we had cots set up and blankets to cover ourselves up with. Mom would always be reluctant to go to the cellar, but it was a strict command to all of us.

When we got into the cellar, Dad would stay upon the steps peeping out from time to time and then replacing the latch that would hold the door down. The wind would blow in when he would take his peek. He would close the door immediately and turn to us and say, "This sure might be a good one, it looks bad out there."

I am not for sure if people back then carried insurance on the house and barns or not. I am not for sure how many storms a year we had but seemed I spent half of my life in the cellar.

When a bad storm did come through and blew away a barn or house, by 8 A.M. the next morning there would be fifteen to thirty people show up and the barn or house would be replaced in no time at all.

The women would bring in food and set it out and serve tea or water to the men while they worked. Them families that come in to help would get their pay at the end of every day. The pay was a pat on the shoulder, and a thank you.

The women would not only serve but would help the woman of the house put together things that had not been destroyed. I can remember seeing hay straw that had been blown into power line poles. There was usually straw in the cabinets if they were left standing.

After a clean up and rebuild, people would sometimes celebrate by having everyone that helped, join them in a big square dance. Dad used me as an example sometimes, because one time we were on our way to the cellar, and the wind picked me up and blew me against the high fence that surrounded the garden. But I held on and was not hurt.

MONEY BANKS AND CHURNS

After the depression, it took people a period of time to start trusting banks again, and this was very true in Oregon County. Even up into the early fifties, people would have a bank account, but it would be small. The real bank account would be in a woman's bra. Working in a grocery store, when you told the family how much the bill was, the woman would reach into her bra and bring the cash out to pay for it. That must to have been a good place because I never heard any stories about people getting robbed. If a man was robbed, there would be only a few dollars. I never heard anyone brave enough to rob a woman from where the money was kept. There was different money in different sides of her bra. Usually, the main money was kept in the left side. The right side had her personal money She would sell cream and eggs, from which she would buy thread, needles and patterns. Some people would put money in a quart fruit jar, seal the lid with wax, and bury it in the ground. From time to time, some of the money would get damp or wet, and it would be hung on the clothes line. It was watched closely.

Then, there was the churn. We did not have one that you turned the handle on. Ours was like a four or five gallon stone jar. (I am not sure it was made of stone or real thick heavy glass). It had a lid made of the same material that fit on top of it with a hole in the center. It was kinda like a toilet plunger. When the cream was put in, you pulled up on the stick and let it back down until you had butter. When the butter was taken out, Mom had wooden molds that the butter would go in to make it look pretty. When the butter was out is when we drank all the real buttermilk that we could. It would have specks of butter all through it.

We had a cream separator. The cream left over would be run through it. Mom would sell the cream and extra eggs. That was considered her personal money.

Some of the old timers would have their rocking chairs fixed up where they could churn while rocking. My favorite churn was a gallon jug that you rocked back forth over the leg while setting in a chair. That's not all that big churn was used for. We grew cabbage and we would cut the worms out of it and cut the cabbage up in the churn and made saurkraut in it. I don't remember what my Mom put in the churn with the cabbage. I know it had some stones in it and the top of it was covered with some kind of leaves, with rocks on the leaves. It would set on the back porch for days until it started smelling like real sauerkraut. You could smell that stuff all the way to the highway. But when she canned it, we would enjoy many ways that she would fix it.

OLD FIDDLERS CONTEST TO SEE WHO GOES TO STATE AT ALTON HIGH SCHOOL GYM.

I am not sure what year this story came from, but it may have been close to 1944. Hardin Franks was president of the Alton Chamber Commerce and was also the mayor of Alton. He had promoted the old time fiddlers contest for Oregon County to be held at the Alton High School Gym.

Bill Stuart was a fiddle maker, and my brother always wanted one of his, but could not afford one. Cliff had bought an old fiddle off my uncle that he liked and was playing it. The fiddle itself was an old Jacob Steinberg and was worth a considerable more than the three dollars he paid for it, but no one knew this at the time. My brother Cliff played the fiddle in a real different way than most fiddlers do. He did not put the fiddle up under his chin. He had long arms, and the fiddle would lay on his arm between the elbow and his hand. Bill Stuart told him not to try and change because that would help him not playing like everyone else.

The night came for the contest, and an overflowing crowd was in the old gym. Mr. Stuart was not in the contest, but he did play for the opening of the event. Each county would have a fiddler's contest, and the winners would go to St. Louis for the state championship.

Cliff was ready with his old fiddle, Harris had his guitar tuned, and I had the Mandolin, and was so young I was shaky.

My brother was named the winner, and we were on our way to Keel auditorium, or that's what I thought. My dad said, "Mr. Franks is going to have his hands full watching after the other two and you were too young . Besides that, I need someone to help me with the chores."

I went off to the barn and had a nice cry and wasn't about to let my two older brothers be disappointed. I made my two brothers promise me they would come back with full details.

The day arrived to leave, and my two brothers had an extra pair of underwear, pants and shirt in a brown paper bag and was ready for Mr. Franks to pick them up. The trip to St. Louis was going to be a four-day trip. I am not for sure how far it was to St. Louis, less than 300 miles, I would say. But they said the trip was tiresome for two Oregon County farm boys who had never gone that far before. After what seemed like forever, the freeway and large buildings started to appear. They never knew before that so many people and cars that the world had in that area.

The street lights were fascinating to them. Jokingly Cliff asked Mrs. Franks, "Are all the streets named Walk and Don't walk?"

With a little laugh, Mr. Franks said, "No, that tells you when you can cross the street."

Harris was engrossed in the size of the buses compared to what he had seen back in Oregon County. Mr. Franks told them he would let them ride one if they would be sure and follow his instructions. He stopped the car and told them that the bus that they had passed would be there in a few minutes, and for them to tell the bus driver where they wanted off. So, he put them on the bus and was telling them that it wasn't too far down to the Majestic Hotel where we would be staying. As they entered the bus they told the bus driver to let them off at the Majestic Hotel, and made their way back towards the back of the beautiful bus, setting by the back door. The bus was crowded and after a short ride, they were at the Majestic. They started working their way to the front of the bus, but people kept pushing them telling them to go out of the back door. They explained that Mr. Franks had given them money to pay with, and they needed to go up front and pay. People angrily said, "You're supposed to pay when you get on. If you didn't, get going out the back door."

Mr. Franks was there waiting for them and after checking into the hotel, they had a room of their own. Mr. Franks had a connecting room. Mr. Franks came in the room and asked if they needed anything.

He walked over to a big window, way up in the sky and said, "See over there? That's the old Mississippi river and we are going to eat at a place that is called a cafeteria. When we get back, I got to run some errands. If you guys will promise me you won't get off the street below, you can walk down to the river, about 10 blocks or so."

Mr. Franks said he had to change shirts before they went to eat, and he would be right back. Cliff and Harris did not get in the big porcelain tub because they took their bath Saturday. They were amazed at the toilet and how the little tank that set on top of it could hold so much water. They tried to flush it dry but couldn't.

Mr. Franks came back and asked, "Are you boys hungry? Let's go eat." He then said, "You boy's can eat all you want. Just take your plate and fill it up as many times as you like."

That was like putting a cow in the sugar cane field at home. There it was, a place called the "Cafeteria." When going inside, there was rows and rows of strange food. Harris said, "It was good and we could eat a lot of it."

Leaving on full stomachs, they were ready to walk to the river. As they went down the sidewalk, the windows had people standing in them with people on the sidewalk looking at them.

We waved at some of them, but none of them waved back and after looking closer, those were not people like us. "They were people made out of plastic with pants and dresses on," my brother explained.

Coming to the river they had a real surprise. It was much larger than all the ponds put together in Oregon County. We never went to the rivers in Oregon County without picking up rocks and skipped them across the water, but there was not a rock to be seen. Everything was concrete and asphalt.

Now was when the new and enjoyable cafeteria experience started posing a problem. Harris began to cramp at the stomach; he needed to use the bathroom desperately. Down home in Oregon County this would not have been a problem at all, because all you would have to do was to step behind a big tree. But here in St. Louis there were cars and people all over, but not very many trees like back home. Cliff told Harris, "Don't think about your problem, and we will walk back to the hotel and you can use that bathroom."

They set a brisk pace for the first two blocks, and then Cliff's stomach felt the same urge. They picked up the pace to a jogging speed for about the next three blocks and by then Cliff was desperate also. Cliff looked over at Harris and said, "Let"s run as fast as we can."

When they got to the revolving doors at the hotel they went through so fast it probably took some time for them to stop spinning.

There it was, a sign on the door just off the lobby marked "Men". They entered as fast as possible and once inside the real problem stared them in the face, "pay toilets" and neither of them had a penny.

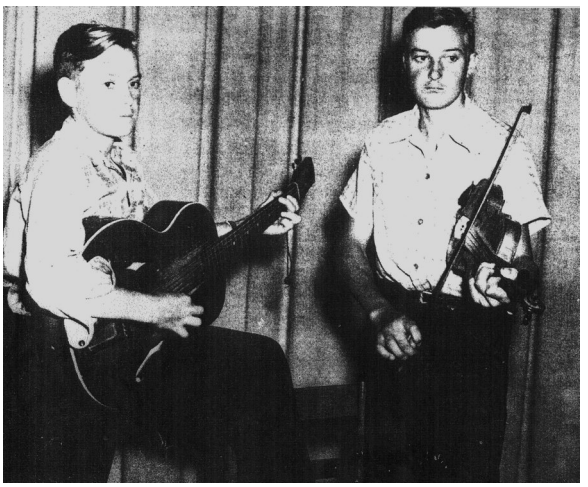
There were five stalls and the doors set about 10 or 12 inches off the floor. Cliff went to his stomach to look under the first door and the toe points of a size 12 cowboy shoes was there, the second one had a pair of business shoes, but the third stall was empty. He was under on his stomach and had gotten in, and he told Harris he wouldn't be long and he could open the door for him from the inside. Harris told him, "Too late now."

They got to the room hoping not too many people would be using the elevator. The plan was that they would put his pants in the big tub and wash them and hang them up in the big window to dry. That is what they did.

It was time to go to Keel Auditorium and rehearse for the show that night where there would be about a 100,000 in the audience. When they got there, Harris discovered he had broken the old white cord that he put around his neck to hold the guitar up for him. He told them he would need a chair to put his foot upon that night. They told him it would be no problem, that one would be setting just behind the curtain where they would enter. He wished that he was home where Mom could iron his pants, but he wasn't. He would have to go on with them unironed.

Keel had large heavy curtains with a 12 foot plant on each side. It was time to go on. The stage was big, and they were going to perform in the middle. They got to the middle and Harris happened to think that he had forgotten to get a chair. He grabs the microphone and says, "Hold on a minute folks, I forgot something,"

This caused cheers, and laughter and Harris has never been one to be funny. Being nervous, he hurried over and looked behind the curtain and grabbed a chair. When he did, a leg of the chair hooked into the 12 foot planter and it fell across the front of the stage. The people were going wild laughing and cheering, thinking this was part of the act. Cliff won third in the Missouri old fiddlers championship, and they won first for most original dress and entertainers.



Harris and Cliff Combs

When they got home they wanted to talk to Dad, and I got in on the conversation. A man from Tennessee had offered them a contract to come to Tennessee and cut some square dance and other music for them. My Dad was short in his decision. "No, that is on the other side of the world. You boys are too young to do something like that."

HAUNTED HOUSE STORIES OF THE EARLY DAYS IN OREGON COUNTY

One of my relatives told a story about how his house was haunted. He claimed from time to time two headless white horses would push open their bedroom door and rear up, and then they would be gone. Many stories have been told on the old Alton courthouse square and most of them from people that would have no reason to make up a ghost story.

One family moved a small table across the room to another wall, and when they got up the next morning, the table had been put back where it was. They moved it again and the same thing happened again. They finally decided to leave the small table where it was because a ghost or something would always move it back where it was. One family could not move a picture from its location without it being put back where it was on an end table.

As most of you might know I lost my youngest child about three years ago, and I hesitate to tell this but things have happened that I cannot explain. We started finding pennies in different places, and we called it, "Pennies from Heaven."

I don't care how careful my wife or myself vacuum the floor, shortly afterward there will be a penny show up in a plain sight area. We have about 8,000 pennies from this experience. This girl used to wake me up by wiggling my big toe, and that still happens. I feel bad about getting upset and calling her name and saying, "Kristin, don't do that." Three more things I will tell you and then I will stop before you ship me off to the crazy house.

My daughter, when I visit her grave site follows me with her eyes and once gave me a big smile that was different than what her picture was on the headstone.

My oldest daughter (only other one) brought her income taxes over for her mother to do on the computer. We were together, and when she ran a copy of the tax form, my deceased daughter's picture was on the first page. It was in a black image but could easily be seen that it was her. We thought that we had seen the picture before so my wife went to an old box of photos to see if she could find the picture, and she found the exact picture.

One more thing and this happened today. As some of you know, my daughter was a nurse and a very good one. When I got out of bed this morning and on my way to the bathroom, I felt something on my back. It was like someone was touching me, and then I still felt something there. When I finally found it with my hand, it was a blue nursing glove.

My wife said, "I have never had a nursing glove in the house."

I smiled and I said to myself, "Good morning Kristin".

I hate to tell a story like this because I have heard many of them and have mixed feelings about them. Again, I am not crazy, I am wide awake, but I cannot explain it to you.

IF THAT OLD ALTON SQUARE COULD TELL STORIES IT HAD HEARD.

I have heard many stories being told on Saturday afternoon by setting with the old timers around the Alton square.

When I was a young kid in Oregon County certain type sales people would come to the farm and try to sell their products. My mother was always glad to see the Watkins man bring his products around, whether she bought anything off him or not. Usually, he had spices and things that you could not buy in the store.

Then there would be the dress shoe salesman coming by, selling real good dress shoes. My Dad said one time, "If I was that shoe salesman, I would follow the Watkins man around because he must wear out a lot of shoes."

Then there was an insurance man selling burial policies. They would be dressed nice and have a shirt pocket full of pens and pencils. They would sometimes explain a policy several times to a family. There was a story about an insurance salesman trying to make sure the woman understood. The salesman said, "Do you understand what you would get if your husband died?" After a little thought she said, "One of those big expensive cars."

Another story the old concrete wall might have heard about insurance was this. The lady had a $50,000 insurance policy on her husband and he died. The insurance man was going to deliver her check himself. When she got the check, she told him, "I would gladly give $5,000 of this back if I could have my husband back."

There were always a lot of headstone salesmen that couldn't spell. Sometimes people would move to Oregon County from another state and could adjust right into the lifestyle, but others couldn't. There was an old tale about a family from out of state moving to Oregon County. The nine-year-old daughter walked into the yard, looked skyward as they were about to leave for Oregon County, and said, "Goodbye God, we're moving to Oregon County."

Her father said, "What Janie really meant was, Good, by God, were moving to Oregon County."

Farmers were dedicated to the land. One man asked a farmer friend what he would do if he won a million dollars. He said, "I guess I would just work this old farm until the money was gone."

Fish stories I could tell all day long, that was told from the concrete seat. Yes, if that concrete setting place around the courthouse could talk, we would sure hear some good stories.

EVERY SMALL TOWN HAS A CHARACTER

In Alton as a little boy, your parents wasn't afraid for any kid to cross the street that ran around the courthouse. The drivers all knew that and drove around very slow.

There were two places that we were warned about jest about every time we went to town. The instructions would come from Mom jest before we left home. She would warn, "If'n you boys know what is good for your health, you'd better stay on the outer side of the sidewalk when you passed in front of that old beer joint. There is not a reason on God's earth why you should be over by that pool hall."

Mom and Dad would get in the cab of the old pickup, and us kids would scramble for our favorite set'n place. We would sometimes sing "Rubber Dolly" or one may take off and start singing "Cotton Eyed Joe." We had a lot of fun riding to town, but coming back was a different story.

Dad would usually give us a nickel to spend, and it was sure hard on this little boys mind. I would stay with him as he took his every Saturday seat around the square with ten or more other men. You could see the front door of the beer joint from there. The windows were painted where you had to be over six foot tall to see in. The thing that I could never understand is those old boys would go into the joint from the back door and get a little tanked up. Then they come out the front door with a smile on their face.

Dad mentioned that old Pete jest come out of the joint and he is headed this way. The men would speak to him but did not give him a chance to get in their conversations. When Pete could not get to have his say, he patted me on the head and started a conversation with me.

He said to me, "Sonny boy, you had any chicks lately?"

I told him, "Yes, but they are big enough to be out running round now."

We kept the hens and eat the roosters, unless one of those old hens stopped laying. If she did, Mom would make chicken dumplings out of them.

Old Pete didn't look right to me in the face.

I said, "Pete, you don't look the same in the face."

Pete explained very quickly, "My wife is a very hard woman to deal with. I drunk a little too much the other day and when I got home my old lady was giving me sh(..) Well I better not say that word to you."

Pete's wife would not let him in the house when he came home drunk, so he would find a place out by the barn, chicken house or hog pen to sleep it off. The next morning when he was trying to chew the fat back meat, he realized he did not have his teeth. He knew he had taken them out where he and two of his buddies shared a fifth of Old Crow. He assumed he had left them there under the bridge. After checking that the false teeth were not there, he ran an ad in the South Missourian Democrat and offered an award.

Mrs. Pete knew he smelled real rank and assumed he had gone asleep in the hog pen. So she took the slop out to the hogs. Sure enough, his teeth were sticking up from the hog wallow. She picked them up and took them into the house but did not tell him she had found them. She was waiting on the South Missourian Democrat newspaper to come showing he was offering an award.

When the South Missourian Democrat newspaper arrived, she said to him, "I notice you got a $5 reward for whoever finds your teeth."

He said, "Yep. Sure hope someone finds them cause it will be worth the $5."

Mrs. Pete replied, "Give me the $5. I found your teeth in the hog pen and hid them. You will get them when I get my $5."

He was not going to give her $5, and she was not going to give him his teeth. After a day or two, he gave in and gave her the $5. She told him, "You orta be ashamed out sleeping with the hogs, taking your teeth out. It's a wonder that one of those old hogs didn't have your teeth in their mouth."

Ole Pete said, "I had to give in. I jest couldn't live on those tomators much longer, and that is the only thing I can chew. Yes sirree, I am ready to dig into a big plate of fried taters and eat them without smashing them up. You know boy, I have been a happy man all my life."

I then asked him if'n he'd been drinking that long.

He replied, "Well, I'd have to tell it this way, don't start doing it like I did. I'd say I've been lucky. I only made one mistake several years ago. We had heard someplace that a Mr. Gideon was put'n his Bibles in all the motel rooms. That really didn't matter to us. We never stayed in one of those places. Anyhow, I was jest set'n there at the bar to have a drink or two. Well, come to think of it maybe more. Anyhow, this floozie looking woman comes up to me and we started having a few more drinks. When I woke up the next morning, I was in one of those rooms. I knew I had to be smart so I got one of Mr. Gideon's Bibles and threw it in the front seat of the truck. I was going to take the Bible in to face that old gal, tell her I had been to church, and the preacher preached all night. I could not believe she remembered someone telling us about Mr. Gideon placing those bibles in motel rooms. Boy was I in trouble. That woman liked to have beat the tar out of me. I reckon I deserved it. Oh yeah, I have had some troubles, like my twin brother, you might not know him, but he always forgets my birthday."

My Dad then pulls me over by the arm and said, "You better go spend your nickel. It's gonna be time to go home before too long. We might leave a little sooner today because I am feeling tared."

Now was when I had to decide. Do I go to the drug store and buy a big ice cream cone, or do I go over to the store and buy one of those big rolls of 12" long strips of that black candy that I hated but it lasted a long time. The ice cream would be gone in ten minutes or less. I would go for the liqorice candy that I didn't like too well, but it lasted a long time. My brothers did like it because there would be some pushing and shoving on the way home from them trying to get a little piece from me.

My Dad told Mom about me talking to Pete after we got home. She promptly made another rule, no talking to drunks.

YES, THERE WERE A FEW OLD CODGERS AND OLD SOURPUSSES IN OREGON COUNTY WHEN I WAS A KID.

There were a few around Alton that like their lives to be private and did not do some of the things that other people would do like setting around the courthouse square. They would not come up and chew the fat with other people.

I hope you understand that some of these words would be thought of differently today than they were when I was a young kid.

The old timers set and talked and whittled around the courthouse square. From time to time, they would see a man cross the street and not be very friendly.

You would hear one say to the other, "There goes that old codger that lives over at," and mentioned the area.

The old codger would not be unfriendly, but he would not take the time to visit and talk about the weather, crops and other things that people would visit and talk about. He was more like a shy, stay away from me man. He really wasn't disliked, but he would have very few friends. He would be the type of person that would not want you to hunt on his land and was usually not part of any church group. Most of the time this would be a man with few or no children. We boys sometimes would try to get the old Codger to talk to us by asking him questions like, "You got any big fish in your ponds?".

He would have a half smile on his face and pat us on the head and keep going, never giving an answer.

Yep, the women had remarks also about an old lady that would disagree with anything and thought she knew it all. The women would say, "I see that old sourpuss standing over there." Deep down they was hoping that she would not come over and get into their visits. The old sourpuss was a woman who was into everyone's business and was a gossiper. She would constantly say something negative about someone who wasn't there. She was a woman that many tried to avoid, but she would be into everything and causing problems.

The old sourpuss would ask questions about our Moms and Dads, trying to get information that she could gossip about and would want. Most of the boys and girls would know she was an old sourpuss and would make their parents look like the light of the world with good words about them.

Things like this hasn't changed that much, maybe we have more Old Codgers and Sourpusses today than we had then. Dad always told us, "If they want to be that way, that is their right. Just be nice and kind to them."

In the rural area of Oregon County, they stood out like a man with a red suit on pitching hay. But in today's world they are hardly noticed.

The adults might have visited around the courthouse in Alton, but we kids also had our time. There were times that I liked to stay with my Dad in town and hear them talk, when I could not find any of my friends. I learned to spit over the sidewalk from a sitting position into an empty parking place just like they did.

It seemed that in the olden days, parents did not mind a seven-year-old to go where he wanted to in Alton and other parts of Oregon County. Like most of my friends, my parents gave me a nickel a week allowance.

YOUR SEAT IN THE PICTURE SHOW WAS YOUR DESIRE ACCORDING TO AGE.

It took three weeks to save enough to go to the picture show. Picture was what we called it in the olden days. I had seen a few non-talking movies with Tom Mix, but I was in the talking movie generation.

When my friends and I got together, we could go to the front of the drug store and see the picture of the big ice cream cone. In our minds we could pretend that we just ate one.

We all had the same rules to go by when we were having fun looking mostly at pictures of good things in the windows. Those rules were short. When you walked on the sidewalk in front of the beer joint or the pool hall, you had to walk on the outer edge of the sidewalk. Both the pool hall and the beer joint windows were painted white up high enough that you had to be six foot tall or more to see in.

On one corner of the square Mr. and Mrs. Glass had the picture show, and we would spend time on the porch looking at Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans and our favorite sidekick Gabby Hayes. I would let Dad keep my allowance until I got enough to go to the show. By doing this, sometimes he would throw in an extra nickel for me to go. When we did get to go in to watch a movie, there would be what we called a serial. It would be continued from week to week and would stop just as the hero was in deep trouble that looked impossible for him to get out of. We usually ask a friend who got to go, how he got out of it.

Back in those days a 7 or 8-year-old wanted to sit in the front row. You would be near the action and feel it. When Gene Autry would ride along on his horse singing a song, you could almost feel the breeze in your hair. You were in the saddle right behind him.

As we got a little older, we would sit in the middle section of the show house and accidentally sit in the seat next to a pretty little girl. The chairs had

armrests on them that you almost had to put your arm upon it. At the first of the movie you tried not to use the armrest, but as the movie went on you found a way of having your arm touching her arm on the armrest. If she liked you, before long, you would find the back of your hand touching the back of her hand, and before the movie was over, you would be holding hands.

As we grew older, and had girls that we called our girlfriends, we wanted to sit near the back of the movie house. We could hold hands without people noticing it. Maybe you put your arm around the back of her seat. You would drop your hand down to her shoulder from time to time making her think it was the excitement of the movie. After the girl had started liking you, there was a cubby hole seat that only seated two people under the projector booth. You might even get a real hug if you were lucky enough to get that place.

The movie house was something that you would save for, and the excitement of the old time movies was thrilling. Something I have thought about, not many parents or older people attended the movies like today, but they trusted the younger ones to be in on the thrill.

Comments:
Mr. and Mrs. John Beck ran the Theater at Thayer, when I was growing up. They did a great job. They had first run pictures, kept it clean and orderly. Johnny Beck's parents purchased the Royal Theater on Front Street in the late Thirties. They rented a building at Second and Chestnut and put in all new equipment with a sloping floor, when Dr. Cooper bought the building in 1941. J. A., their son, inherited and ran it along with the drive-in south of town until he sold out along about 1980, give or take. Dick Mooney purchased it and sold it to the Tuckers who ran it until it closed. Kevin Steed now owns the building. He'd make you a deal if you would like to go run it. Max H. Evans

That Beck Theater has great memories for me. It was a long way to Thayer from Alton for us, but going to the Theater was our honeymoon trip when my wife and I got married in 1955. Bill F. Combs

THE STORE ON THE CROSSROADS AT JOBE

I have often thought of my Dad visiting Alton on a Saturday afternoon setting around the courthouse square before we moved closer to Alton. Miles Dethrow had a store in Jobe where the same tradition happened. It would have been a long way back then, cause it must have been fifteen miles or farther. Miles and his wife owned the store on the crossroads. It set across from Will Gum's ranch foreman's house that was Christ Ford and then later Austin Sanders.

In front of the store set a gas tank with a big handle on the side of it. Miles would sometimes let me hold the handle with him while he pumped five gallons of gas up into a big clear container with gallon marks on it. He would pump the gas to the gallon mark that you wanted and then the hose would drain it in your gas tank. St. Louis people talked funny to us then. The story was told that one of those city fellows come to buy gas and wanted to put it on a credit card. They told him, "What we call credit in this neck of the woods is when someone does something good."

They would be behind a long counter on the left side as you walked into the store. About the first thing you would see was an arched glass cabinet full of sewing thread and needles. Then you would see a little farther down a wooden barrel that your Dad would tell you to keep your hands out of. It would be full of pickles and pickle juice. Then there would be a metal box with double lids on top of it, with ice in it to keep the soda water cold. The candy was also in a container were you could just reach in and get how many peaces you wanted to purchase.

Things was not like Wal-Mart is today. You pointed behind the counter and told them what you wanted and they would get it and set it on the counter close to the big cash register. On the back wall and right wall was mostly farm supplies. The right hand side of the store was long benches where people gathered and visited. They would usually have a horseshoe pitching contest in which the winners got a big orange soda water.

The young kids would also compete with each other. We small kids could not join some of the things they come up with. I remember one Saturday a little ways out from the back of the store, they had a yellow jackets nest in the ground. The adults would take a stick and arouse them. Then they would throw pennies around the hole. The bigger kids would go in to see how many they could get. Sometimes they would have arm wrestling. You never knew what until you got there.

The store was halfway between Cotton Creek school and home. I had located a vacant place that left a couple or three old hens and I would hurry to see how many eggs there were. Miles would give me candy for them. Yes, that store was a lot like Alton on a smaller scale.

Boy, do I have memories of the Jobe Store. Clyde and Sarah Tyler owned it when I was in high school. I worked in the store for them during my sophomore and junior year. I stayed with them and worked mornings before school, evenings after school and on Saturday. Dad would pick me up Saturday evening. I would go home and then back to Jobe Store Monday after school. I also worked during the summers. We had just about anything the local people need-

ed. I waited on customers, pumped gas, loaded feed, and sold bottled propane. One day a week I would drive Mr. Tyler to West Plains to pick up a truckload of supplies. He had something he called "sleeping sickness." He would fall asleep while driving or whatever he was doing. Mr. and Mrs. Tyler were wonderful people that came to our part of the country from Tyler, Texas. The store was still a gathering place for people that lived nearby. I loved to listen to the stories that were told around that big wood stove in the winter. My Mom and Dad opened the little store at Deckard Y during my junior year, and I quit working at Jobe and helped them.

Comments:
My oldest brother, Alick Combs, was the foreman at the ranch across from Jobe Store for awhile. At one time my second brother, Charlie, and then my brother-in-law, Loyd Godwin, worked there. I can't remember exactly when they worked there, don't think they were all there at the same time, but I remember that at some time, they all lived and worked there. It was after Will Gum sold it, probably late fifties. I know it was before I worked at Jobe Store. Vercie Combs

Charlie and Dorothy Robinson had the store at Jobe for years before they moved to Thayer in the early 1930's. He never had credit cards but "carried" many people on the books. Lynn Martin

DAD TOLD ME ABOUT KISSING GIRLS IN OREGON COUNTY

Here we were, Mom holding my hand as a real small child on the courthouse square in Alton. Some other lady walked up with her little girl holding her by the hand. I don't know why little girls like to hug and kiss little boys. After a short time, the little girl who had been looking at me made a move and hugged me and placed a kiss on my cheek. I very quickly moved behind my mom ready to get under her dress if that little girl came around there.

She did not, but her mother said, "Come around here Billie and let me see you."

I came around on the opposite sides of where her daughter was. Low and behold she reached down and picked me up and kissed me on the cheek! She turned the conversation from sewing to how cute I was. She said, "Look at those big brown eyes and his curly hair. When he gets older you will have to fix a lot of fried chicken on Sundays, because the girls will be after that boy; he is a knockout."

I wanted my feet back on the ground and as she was putting me down. Would you believe it, she placed another kiss on my cheek. To get away, I told

Mom I needed to use the potty. She said, "Are you sure or you wanting to go in the courthouse just to flush the stool? Do you need to do number one or number two?"

I told Mom I didn't do numbers like the bigger boys do; I just needed to go to the bathroom. She said, "OK, your Dad is sitting over there talking to Andy, and he is not going to be too happy about taking you in the courthouse."

He was not unhappy because he said he needed to go himself and took my hand. I thought I would act big around him, so on the way I said to him, "Do you need to do number one or number two?" He looked at me and said, "You don't need to know." (I had no earthly idea what number one or number two meant).

I usually talked to my Dad at home when something was bothering me. I told him that I didn't like little girls hugging or kissing me and neither did I like grown ups doing that to me. Dad said when you get older a girl could get pregnant by kissing. My little mind was starting to work and wondering if any kisses that those older ladies were giving me had any children by those kisses.

A few weeks later a little girl's parents came to our house for dinner on Sunday. The little girl and I were playing out in the yard. She got close to me and was going to kiss me on the cheek. I shoved her away and told her not to kiss me, or she would be pregnant. Dad had told me that a woman's tummy got big with a child inside of it when they were pregnant. This had me confused, so I decided I would tell him something.

"Dad, when we seen that woman in town one time and her tummy was real big and I asked you about it, you told me she had swallowed a watermelon seed."

He turned, smiled, and said, "You are too young for this conversation."

DANCING WAS A SIN UNLESS IT WAS DONE THE RIGHT WAY

In the forties and fifties we did not have proms like kids do today. It just wasn't allowed by the Alton school. In fact, dancing was looked down upon unless it was done in a certain way.

If a family put up a new house, as soon as the sub-flooring and open 2X4's were up for the walls, friends and neighbors would come in and celebrate by having a square dance. My brothers and I would play music for these dances. Most of the time we would set in the middle of the house. One square on front

and one on back would be square dancing to the music. I won't call any last names, but my first gig to play with my brother was a Leon's new house. My Dad had placed a guitar in my hands many times. I would tell him my arms were not long enough to reach up and chord it. So, we ordered a $7.50 mandolin from Wards. I am not for sure if one of my brothers paid for it or my Dad.

"This is what you are going to be playing for now," he said. "When we play, you put your fingers on the strings and work the pick like you are playing it."

The first night I come to play with my brothers at a shindig at Leon's house. (Shindig was two different things, it meant a dance of special occasion or a man that could dance by himself). My older brother Glen was a good square dance caller and played the French Harp. My Dad played the Juice Harp and the French Harp also. My brother just older than I was played the guitar. Cliff played an old fiddle that he bought off of an old man. It said Stradivarius on the inside. My dad would make plain that there would be no whisky or beer drinking when we played. I know some of those old boys felt too good to not have been drinking. What they had done was hide it and go take a drink from time to time.

Most of my brothers and I played several instruments after a time. If we went through Alton, it would be about six miles to Leon's new house. But if we cut through the woods, it would be about half the distance. We had permission from Tom to drive wherever we wanted to in his woods because he knew we would shut the gates and repair any fence that had to be cut better than it was before.

By then I had learned to chord and play on the Mandolin. My dad would come out of the house and tell us to get the ax and put it in the Model A. Hammer and nails were also loaded. Then he would say, "Get your music loaded boys."

I remember when we were driving through the woods, the older boys took turns in being a front runner, someone that the car would follow and be sure that the car did not get into a ditch, hit a stump or get into trees too close for the car to go between.

We got to Leon's new house. My dad set me up on a 55 gallon wooden barrel and told me to play with a little action. I always had something that I can't describe, a look on my lips when I played. The square dancing would stop for about 15 minutes. At about half of the time we were to be there, we had to keep playing because usually four or five men would take turns coming out in the middle to do a shindig. (I think they called it clod hopping). Oregon County had

some great clod hoppers or shindiggers. That would be quite a show, these men trying to be better than the one before.

This type of dancing was not considered to be a sin in Oregon County.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN SKINNY DIPPING?

If your answer is "No," more than likely you are not a farm boy raised in Oregon County. To be frank with you, I could only answer the question by saying, "Numerous times." I can't answer for the girls, but if I had to guess, I would say, "Yes."

I cannot remember having to ask my Mom or Dad, "Can I go swimming?" We played a game called, "foxes and dogs" that required a lot of running in the woods. You were either trying not to be caught or trying to catch someone. We would work up a sweat and be hot when the game was over. We'd pull our clothes off and jump in the pond for a swim.

On Sunday afternoon when several families got together for dinner and visitation, there would be enough kids that we could play "pop the whip." We would line up and hold hands in a straight line. Usually the strongest boy would be the leader.

Before the game would start you would hear Mom saying, "You little kids get out of the line so you won't get hurt. Come play ring around the rosy or drop the handkerchief."

After the line was formed, then the leader would start running and zig zagging trying to pop the one on the end of the line off. If you were popped off, you were out of the game called "pop the whip." After the game, the bigger ones headed towards the pond to cool off.

There was an old story told about four girls who would go to the old farmer's pond and go skinny dipping because it had a sand bottom and some sand on the bank. One day the old farmer walked across to the isolated area where the pond was and saw four teenage girls were skinny dipping. He walked up with a bucket in his hand. The girls lowered themselves in the water where he couldn't see their bodies and asked the old farmer to leave long enough for them to put their clothes on.

The old farmer said, "I didn't come back here to see your bodies, I came to feed the two alligators I have in there. I forgot to feed them yesterday."

Comments:
I would say most Oregon County farm boys has skinny dipped. Thayer kids swam in the Warm Fork Creek or River as it is known on maps and at Mammoth Spring. The swimming hole closest to town was Turtle Hole, then Tree Hole was the next swimming hole up the creek. It was beside the rock cropping. Then the creek made a crook to the east The next swimming place was Powell Hole. There were often skinny dippers at that place, young and old, sober and not, etc. There were other places as well: N. B. Allen Ford, the Old Iron Bridge, Mill Pond and Sloan's Ford. As we said, before the creek was deeper then, way over a kids head. It was a great place to swim if you didn't mind leeches, snakes, broken bottles, barb wire and other things to keep a person from reaching manhood.
Max Evans

Once when I was skinny dipping in the Warm Fork River, I got caught by an Arkansas Sheriff's deputy, who then proceeded to model his tighty whities. He later ran across me at the Reunion and followed me, asking when he would "see" me again.
Renee Ray

My girlfriend, Janice, and I would swim at Dam 3 south of Mammoth Spring. If our parents said we couldn't go in swimming again, we would sneak across the Dam to the area below. We would skinny dip on the side not visible from the dam. This would keep our clothes dry. We would put our underpants on our hair like a hairnet as well. Then we would go back home and nobody was the wiser.
Jenny Underwood

A FUNERAL IN THE OLDEN DAYS OF OREGON COUNTY

My Dad and Mom were both buried by funeral homes and not the way my grandfather, and other people in the earlier days were. My grandfather was a man who wanted his independence. We fixed the smokehouse up with a bed, couch and a large heating stove. My Mom would do the cooking and I stayed with him. The smokehouse was only about 30 or 40 ft. off to the left in the rear of our house, so he could have his independence and still be close to one of his sons.

One night in 1947, this 10 year old boy woke up and found his Grandfather was dead. I really don't remember if my Grandfather had been sick or not. I don't think so because if he would have been, Mom and Dad would have moved him into the house. People in those days just seemed to live until they died. In those days one of the jobs a sheriff did and also the telephone operator was to spread news to families in case of emergencies. My uncle Leonard, Wild Bill, an-

other brother, and a daughter had been notified very quickly and was shortly on the scene. The whole community was in action when someone died. There was a pine box to be made, filled with beautiful white lining and lace and a pillow for the head.

As soon as someone died, the mirrors would be covered in the house. The body was placed in the box that had been fixed for burial and put on two saw-horses in the living room. People would bring food enough for an army. In pretty weather, that food would be placed on long boards held up by saw horses. The people would come and place the food on the long table outside and then go inside to view the body. After viewing the body and some mourning, they would go back outside and set and talk about the one who had died while eating all day.

While this was going on, a group of men would go to the grave site with picks and shovels and dig the grave. The body would be buried the day following. We loaded Grandpa in the beautiful pine box on the back of our iron wheel wagon which had a seat for Mom and Dad up front. We kids sat around the edge of the wagon with our feet hanging off. As we crossed the low water crossing at Frederick, a rock had washed upon the concrete of the low water that Dad did not see. When the wheel of the wagon hit the rock on Mom's side, it bounced her off the seat into the water. She got up and wrung the water out of her dress and we continued on. I am not for sure if the funeral was held by the grave site or maybe in the old school building. I don't believe the church had been built yet. The crowd was huge when we said goodbye to Grandpa.

MY DAD's FUNERAL

My Dad and Mom had made arrangements with the funeral home in Thayer and everything was taken care of. I do remember that my Mom was supported by many people and food was everywhere. I had been gone from home for several years and did have the opportunity to visit my Dad by a wild airplane ride before he died.

At his funeral we gathered at the funeral home and began our way to Cotton Creek with about three inches of ice on the ground. But the line of cars reached from Couch from Cotton Creek. Claudie Johnson was the preacher and the church was over filled. People stood elbow to elbow along the walls.

Millard Barton was with my Dad when he died and I will never be able to thank him enough for his help as my brother and sister were overcome and tired with the caregiving that he was requiring. I am not for sure but I think Millard Barton, Noel Gene Johnson and Lavern Smith johnson did the singing and did a wonderful job.

Claudie preached for about an hour bringing back memories. The crowd along the wall would be the first to view his body. Then they would go out back to the grave site. It took about an hour for the viewing and then the family would view the body. A loud noise of weeping went on not only from the family but also from friends. Many of them would faint at the viewing and would have to be helped out.

Somehow, I got separated from the family and was trying to make my way to the grave site, but friends wanted to be close also and I failed in the effort. I walked out of the crowd and looked towards the old school building which was gone except for the front porch. I then turned and looked over the bluff in back of the graveyard towards the open field with the old haunted house in the middle of it. Then my eyes and face were covered with ice from frozen tears as I tried to see the old home place through the woods, but I could not see it from there.

After the service in the graveyard, people would come up to me and say, "You're one of the Combs boys aren't you?"

I would say, "Yes" and they would always mistaken me for a younger brother or an older brother.

MY MOM'S FUNERAL

My real hurt come when my mother passed away about ten years later. I was pleased with myself that I had made it possible for her to do things she had dreamed about doing all her life, things such as go to the Grand Opry. After she was gone I had no home to go to any longer, my parents were gone.

I am dedicating this story to Cassville, Missouri American Heritage class. A close friend of mine has also lost her father and mother and can relate to what I am saying. She is an educator and her name is Darlene (Reynolds) Post.

I would also like to leave a message to young people. Be the type of young person who looks up to your Mother and Dad. If you are to be home at 10:30, be home at 10:00. If your parents tells you to do something, do more than they ask. Make them trust you and have fear of God. If you do this, you will have pleasant memories of your parents and life will be easier after they are gone. You will not have your parents forever so help them while you can because before you realize it, they will no longer be on this earth. Be kind and nice to people also and they will pay you back double. Have respect and your funeral will be over flowed with friends.

THE BARBER SHOP ON THE SQUARE IN ALTON

I am going back again as a kid that was seven or eight years of age in Oregon County, Missouri. Now, I can remember back when I thought Oregon County was the whole world. Only a little of the county was, I should say, because I never got to see some of Oregon County.

I will say that we did go to another country called Arkansas once a year, and it was a long way. Might have been as much as seventy miles. We would have to put an extra tire fixing kit in the truck. The average mileage to the flat is what we counted then and not miles per gallons of gas. Anyhow, having flats were common. We could usually get fifteen or twenty miles per flat, ifn we were lucky. The cotton farmers were there in their trucks on the side of the road waiting on us, to try to get us to pick cotton for them.

Ah shucks, I got off what I wanted to say before I even got started. But I will say this, we could brag a little about being in a foreign place. OK, now I will say what I was going to. My mind seems to be full of the forties and fifties, and I feel a great need to share. I usually just set down and it comes rolling out, but this time, one thing crowded out another.

Ok, this is it, I hope. We didn't use excuse me much, unless we needed to go to the bathroom at school. My momma taught me that. There I go again, I will tell you about my momma, sometime when my mind can't resist.

Right now, I want to talk about the barber shop in Alton. We didn't get store bought or barber shop hair cuts. Daddy had a big bowl that fit well on all of us boys heads, and a clipper with two handles on it. He would pull together and the way it hurt, it might have just pulled your hair out. It was worse than a whipping. But we didn't let Dad know that because he might have started cutting our hair.

The barber shop was narrow, but long enough for several chairs along the wall. Seems to me there were maybe eight or ten, because these chairs were not waiting chairs for a haircut. They were chairs that people made conversation in. You could keep up with the St. Louis Cardinals and crop predictions. You could get the weeks weather forecast there, and whose old lady was knocked up, (I hope those two words is OK. I never used it and never knew what it meant. It was just a word to me). High school basketball was a lot of the conversation. They would know even how many points any player had scored.

The shop was operated by Truman Railey and David Combs, and later was joined by Gene Boze.

I would stay with my Dad at that time, most of the time, but he would not let me take a chair. I would stand between his long legs and not talk, just pay close attention to what was being talked about. I got in trouble one time because I asked my dad, "What did that word mean, when the man was talking about the old lady of someone?"

He put his hand over my mouth and said, "Some of these days you will know what all words mean."

Well, I jest felt bad that some no good husband hit his wife that hard. Couldn't figure why I would have to grow up to know why. David looked at me and said, "Come over here and sit up in this chair. I am tared of setting."

I did and he lifted me up in the chair and before I could say, "Thank you", (my Momma taught me to say that and my Daddy taught me some of those words that wasted your breath also), he had thrown a blanket over me and had his clippers in his hand. I told him he better not do that and he wanted to know why. I told him, "I did not have 50 cents and I don't want Dad to spend that much either."

He knew that my Dad cut my hair and was a barber also at home. He said, "This one is on me."

I thought, no, it's not the blanket is on me. He then asked my Dad ifn he could give me a free haircut and my dad nodded his head yes. I don't think I had ever had a store bought haircut before and it was real relaxing. He did not pinch me or pull a hair, not one time. Ifn my Daddy was still alive, I probably would not tell you this.

We had a thing back in the olden days that was called gaps in your home hair cuts. Dad was sure good at putting them in your hair, but David didn't have nary one in his hair cut.

When we got home my brothers were jealous and would say, "You think you are the cock of the walk, don't you?"

I guess the cock of the walk meant the way our old rooster walked and there was nuttin special in that to me.

Well, I am glad I got around to it. I just wanted you to know that the

building with the red and white pole turning, was not only a place for some people to get a haircut; it was a newsstand, a weather station, a sports station, an agriculture center and I guess ifn I may use the word, to find out how some mean man had treated his wife.

Well, I am glad I got my mind thinking right on what I wanted to write. My wife told me it shouldn't be hard, no more than I had. Now, you may think that's mean of her, but I ain't about to knock her up or down for it.

BIG BUSINESS IN THE EARLY DAYS

When a person bought a new pair of shoes in the early days, before they even wore them, they would be taken to the shoe repair shop. They would have a little moon shaped piece of metal put on the heels and toes of the shoes to help keep the heel and soles from wearing out so fast. Joe Black owned the shoe repair place on the corner across from the picture show. He was so busy putting on soles and heels of shoes, he would have to hire help. When he closed, Watson's shoe repair opened up down the street in Alton.

Most people would order shoes from the Wards Catalog. If they didn't fit right, the shoe store could make them fit. People watched the wear on their shoes. If the heel or sole started wearing too bad; they were taken to the shoe shop. The shoe shop would resole and put new heels on the shoes at a very low price. They had machines that could patch a hole in the leather.

One thing a person has to realize about those olden days is that the oldest boy in the family is the one who got the new shoes and clothes. When he out grew them, then they would be worn by the next to oldest one. Shoes were no exception. I guess it was called the same as it's called today, hand-me-downs.

We would pull our shoes off to wade across the creek in zero degree weather to preserve them. We knew that would be the shoes that little brother would wear also. Our work shoes would have to be cared for also. Some kids would wear knee-high rubber boots to school and also to work in. (I always hated to set behind the ones that did that because of the smell of hog pens and cow manure would stay on them). The big trouble we had with the leather work shoes was if you didn't keep them greased down with possum fat, the leather would crack.

Shoe repair was a big business that died a natural death. I would not know where to look for a shoe repair place or if they still use those steel taps any longer.

Comments:
I sure remember the shoe repair places, too, Bill F. Combs. We bought ours from Owen Best's shoe store. He did the repairs, also. Girls sure used those heel & toe taps, too. The guys like the noise, walking down the school halls, but girls - not so much. Girls also had to hand down their clothes to the next girl, too, and they were often made from feed sacks. I was the only girl in our family, so I got some rummage sale clothes now and then to supplement my feed sack clothes. Sometimes I wore my older brothers' shirts to play in. We normally had 3 pairs of shoes and they were mostly all alike. The newest ones were for church, then when they were used for school, and lastly, for playing after school. You changed to work and play shoes IMMEDIATELY when you got home, also to change your clothes to your old ones.
Patricia Walsh Goebel

Was a way of life, changing into older clothes to play. I was in pretty good shape, the oldest of four boys. In 1940, there were two full-time shoe repairmen and usually one apprentice at the Sweeney Shoe Store at Thayer.
Mr.Max Evans

There is actually a shoe repair shop still in West Plains. I've taken some of my expensive shoes there. My girls wear some hand me down shoes, but they are so likely now to wear out before they are out grown (at least with my rough and tumble girls). Only church shoes make it to the next child. Some of their clothes do get handed down, but the ones from the oldest don't usually make it to the youngest. I gave a lot of my older two kids clothes away because there was no place to put them, then the people we gave them too have handed down stuff to the younger ones. Stuff now days just doesn't seem to be made to last like things made back then.
Sarah Scott Blankenship.

GIRLS SURE LIKED THAT SMELL

Now I am not going to tell my Mom about this, she ain't much of one for girls touching a boy or a boy touching a girl. I guess that's jest away most maws are in Oregon County.

Most Moms better not catch you holding hands with some cute little thing. I guess I used the wrong word, maybe a grown up word cause those 10th -12th. grade girls were cute girls. Anyways, boys would think what Mom didn't know would not hurt her. I think some of those boys that lived in Thayer and Alton were even kissing them sometimes. Now if'n you're thinking the story might not be true, just ask Mr. Max Evans, cause he will know what I am talking about.

When I was in high school like Max, I played more basketball than most boys did that played basketball. In the locker room, we had a big concrete room with two pipes coming out of the wall that would give you a good shower. Now I wasn't afraid of the shower, but I was taught not to waste anything, even though it might have been the last basketball game since I had a shower. I had taken spit baths. That's where you wet a washcloth and acted liked you are scrubbing yourself to satisfy Mom.

Anyhow, what I am trying to say is this. Before a basketball game, we would get a lecture about the other team and our game plan. No shower for me because I knew when I got through playing the game, I would take a shower then. It seemed to work out well. If any game will make you sweat, basketball had to be on top. Sweat would pour from the top of your head and even get those dirty white socks wet that you would be wearing. The smell would be extra strong in the dressing room. I could even smell my armpits when I raised them to shoot a jump shot during the game. Your feet would be so strong with the smell of sweat that you had to turn your head a little when you took off your shoes. In my case even before the game.

But I can tell you one thing for sure, the people in Oregon County loved that smell. If'n I'd been smart, I would have figured out how to bottle it. The girls could leave it on their dressing tables at home, to put a little on while using the amount of make-up their mothers would allow them to wear. Moma's didn't want those girls of theirs looking like an old hussy. I could have probably sold enough to be rich, if'n I could have figured it out, cause those girls could hardly wait to smell you. They seemed to like to smell me longer and closer in a close win.

At about a minute left in the basketball game, the cheerleaders were the first to get ready for a good smell. When the buzzer sounded that ended the game, they would rush on the floor and lock their legs around you, and their arms tight around your neck. Then here comes more, the girls that were watching the game would not be left out. Here they come to get their smell. Some of those girls could have been good football players, but we knew nut'n about football. The first football that I had ever seen is when the coach brought one to school just before baseball season. We busted it because we all jumped on the one that had it.

Anyhow, going back to what I was saying, those girls would almost knock you down, especially me because I had my hands behind my back because Moma didn't want me to touch girls. I don't know what was so good about that sweat smell. I didn't mind it when it was light, but didn't care for it either. When it got strong, those girls liked it. I took a shower in the locker room, because I

didn't care for it and I didn't want those girls jumping on me, so I kept it at a low level or hardly any atall.

Funny how things has changed. In Oregon County girls loved that strong basketball sweat smell, and now as soon as I come in from working, my wife will say, "You need to go ahead and take a shower, you smell like sweat."

Oh well, I probably wouldn't have made any money out of it anyhow and if'n I had, that would have jest been one more thing to worry about. Wonder how much a bottle of it would have sold for in those olden days in Oregon County? Probably a nickel or more.

SECOND FATHER, BEST FRIEND AND BASKETBALL COACH, AND HOW BUSINESS MEN IN ALTON SUPPORTED THE GAMES.

The greatest disappointment of my high school year was the bad news I received that Coach, Carl Mac Johnson would not be back my senior year in high school as basketball coach. His brother, Hal (which we called Rodney) had graduated and I liked to play on a team with. He was a good player and he was not selfish with the ball in any way. Rodney never lost his temper towards another weaker player that I can remember.

I found out that Thayer had hired him. I knew I could not play for him there, because I lived in Alton. I was so upset that when I seen him coming down the street one day, I lit a cigarette just to show him my displeasure. We spoke and then he passed on going down the street. I have regretted that to this day. But I was angry, thinking he would leave before I finished my senior year. We had been to State my junior year and now he was leaving.

Almost all of the business men in Alton were really good basketball fans, and the ones that were real dedicated would set on the edge of the stage. On the other side the wall would let down into the hall way and would be the bleachers.

Billy Joe Millsap seemed to know how far he could go in getting on the referees for bad calls. Wilbur Cox would be the team booster, giving credit to every player on a good play that had been made. There was Hardin Franks and he was quiet but gave good fatherly encouragement. Erman McGibney was also among the group and others that were real supporters of the team.

Coach Johnson gave me my first basketball and goal. He was aware that my family was poor and was like a second father to me. He knew I could not afford new playing shoes every year as some that lived in town could, so at the

end of every year he would clean the locker room out and would have many shoes that boys had left behind. I could usually find a couple of pair that would fit me. One cold night after a game he asked me a question, "Why don't you ever wear a coat?"

I had a coat but it was a ragged blue gene work coat, and I told him a little fib, "I don't like wearing coats."

He took the prettiest brown swede jacket off his back and threw it towards the building saying, "I don't either. I am throwing this one away. I guess someone will use it, would you like to have it?"

It was a great coat and I wore it for about three years.

Our new coach was named Bill (I won't use his last name). He knew about as much about basketball as a fifth grader would. Our first game my senior year was with Couch and we were loosing late in the game. I had the nerve to go to him and tell him we had to do something different. He said tell the team what needs to be done. We went back to the floor with a plan for me to shoot a lot because I was considered a good jump shooter. I scored 40 points that game but it was not enough. We got beat our first game of the season. Three of us on the team had played the year before with Hal and we were not used to losing the first game of the year.

There was one game I wanted to play thinking about coach Johnson my senior year that I did set a school scoring record of 70 points. When we played West Plains where he now coached, we did beat them. This was kind of a bittersweet win for me. We finished the season well but not like we did with Coach Johnson.

Later years I was at a graduation where Hal was superintendent and spotted coach Johnson in a distance standing in front of a trophy case. My wife and I hurriedly went there hoping he would still be there. He was, as I approached him I asked, "Do you know who I am?

He didn't say anything but reached to get his billfold out of his back pocket and showed me a picture of myself my senior year.

When I was talking to my neighbor I said something about the best friend that I ever had. When I mentioned his name, he said, "I played basketball under him in West Plains and found out he lived in the community and had other nice visits."

He has passed on now, but he still lingers in my heart and the picture of the Alton business men's support still hangs clearly in my mind after almost sixty years. Yes Oregon County was good to this country boy.

PINBALL MACHINE AT VIRGINIA'S CAFE IN ALTON

From time to time, you would have an extra nickel and want to play a pinball machine at Virginia's cafe. Harold would keep watch that some of the boys would not put the two front legs on top of their shoes before they put the nickel in. If they were careful not to shake the machine, it would not tilt.

I would never play unless a boy by the name of Pinball Cagel was in the cafe. You could give him a nickel, and he would play the first game or two and you could hear the loud popping of free games being put on the machine. After he had won 15 or 20 free games, he would step back and say, "There you are."

There were always four or more boys just watching around the machine. We took time about playing until we got down to about three or four games. Then Pinball would take over again, and the popping would start and he would build up another 15 or 20 free games.

The cafe was a favorite place for the teen. On Saturday nights, you would see three or four boys sitting at a table with an empty soda pop bottle in front of them, that they had finished an hour before. At another table, you might see a couple of girls talking to a boy with empty soda pop bottles on the table in front of them. Then at another table you might see a boy and girl splitting a hamburger and drinking soda pop.They had a long bar with a spinning seat that some would set on with nothing in front of them, just making a spin around from time to time.

There was a game that the boys with cars played on, who could drive around the courthouse the most times without stopping? The end stool was used for the counter, and the record was known by all the other boys who had cars. The record was held by a boy with the last name of Williams for a long time. I can not remember how many times around it was, maybe close to a hundred. To make it official, you had to have a counter sitting on a stool in Virginia's. The observer would ask, "How many times has he got now"?

We did a lot of sharing. We shared playing the pinball machine, a soda pop, even a hamburger and french fries. If Harold noticed someone who looked like they wanted a soda pop, but did not have any money, many times he would bring them one and say, "This is on me."

For me and others who enjoyed those times, picking wild flowers, and butterfly days are gone. No more running through the fields with our dogs. Virginia and Harold are both gone.

BASEBALL IN THE 40'S

Who knows anything about a man who use to come to the Alton baseball field on Sunday afternoon? He had a catcher with him, and he would invite people to try and hit the ball that he pitched? Somehow the news would get around that he was going to be there usually about two times a month. This would have been in the middle forties. I could describe what he looked liked to this day. His name was Preacher Rowe, and he was a pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals. He was a tall man. His head was the size of a big water bucket, and he had dark black hair.

I think knew him because my Dad played what they called town baseball back before I was born. Dad and five other men would go to different towns and play a nine-man team, with them only having six. The way he explained it to me was they had a pitcher and catcher. A man that played between first and second base and would cover both. Then a man that would play between third and second base would share covering second base and would also be the short stop. My dad was a fielder on the right side, and another man was the fielder on the left field, center field would be covered by both.

The real drawing card for them was that they only used two gloves for the pitcher and the catcher. The rest of the team did not have gloves. The secret was to put on a good show. My Dad and the other outfielder wore bib overhauls with big loose back pocket that ran all away across the rear. The crowd would roar when a fly ball was hit, and dad or the other outfielder would catch the ball in the big back pocket.

The other thing was that there were six good ball players and using six people they would get to bat more often. Any one of the six could hit a home run at will. My dad once told me that usually a town that wanted them to come would not have a real good team. They would be easy for a good pitcher to keep many from getting to hit the ball unless he wanted to add a little action in the game. They called my Dad Pepper. I wish I could have seen them play, but that was before my days.

Comments:
That is interesting, about the clown baseball. Back in the day, the smallest towns had a semi-professional town team, and in Thayer's case played very competitive style baseball. Several of the Thayer players had played professional ball in the

minor leagues. Preacher Roe grew up at Viola. He signed with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1938 out of Harding College at Searcy, but only played one year with St. Louis before being traded to Pittsburgh. He finally pitched for the Brooklyn Dodgers where he gained fame when he beat the Yankees in a World Series game about 1950 or thereabouts. He retired to West Plains, ran a grocery for several years and died a few years ago. A very talented pitcher, Rusty Lewis lived at Thomasville. He played in the minor leagues for the St. Louis Cardinals but quit organized baseball before he reached the major leagues. He pitched for several town teams, including Alton, Thayer, etc. at given time. Another good pitcher in that area was John Cordell of West Plains. Not a pitcher, but the best-known baseball player from that area was Bill Virdon from West Plains. He graduated from High School in 1949, played for Cardinals, Yankees, and Pittsburgh, managed several big league clubs including the Yankees and Astros. Another good player was Ted Gullic of Koshkonong. He played and managed for years beginning in the 20s to 50s, retired to West Plains and ran an insurance agency. Are you thinking of a guy who lived there at Alton, had a big head? Max Evans.

LEAVING OREGON COUNTY GOING INTO A FOREIGN LAND

The story I am going to write has the truth stretched in it some, and even could be considered fiction, but the truth in most cases. It's what I call spicing up a story. Some of the words will be misspelled on purpose to try and help the reader get into the story. I hope you are not thinking I am uneducated. I got my Masters degree first out by the barn. Then I went to college and have a Bachelor's degree.

In the forties things were different than they were in the fifties. But the forties and fifties were the best time in history in my thinking. I want this story to show how hard it was for an Oregon County farm boy. I said boy because it might have been just me. Back in the forties, a man did not wear earrings, and the women were limited to two, one in each ear. The Beatles were a bug that Mom had in the garden and in the fifties they turned into four young boys that caused girls to faint when they sang. In the forties and fifties Coke was a soft drink in a glass bottle, not a powder that is sniff off of a table. If you did not grow up in the forties and fifties you missed a lot.

Mrs. Eva Ford Ashford wrote a comment a few day ago about how her Dad told her about starving children in China to get them to eat their food. Well, we didn't know much about China, but we did know about Hitler. My dad would say to us, "I think you've had your share. The rest of us have to eat also."

I was 18 years of age and had dreams of making big money like the guys who drove to St. Louis each week, worked, and came home on the weekends.

They would set around the square at the Alton courthouse square and talk about their jobs. I decided to give it a try, even though I was making pretty good money at Wallace store. I lived within walking distance because we did not have a car the first year of our marriage. We lived in the old Dairy Queen building for $15 a month, and we bought our furniture for $15. My wife never liked to hear the big motor that set on top of the frigidaire. We bought our first car, and it was a 46 Plymouth. We packed our clothes and left all the furniture with the house and headed for St. Louis. After getting over the Greer Spring with one break-down on the car, we made it into St. Louis.

All I knew about St. Louis was that the people talked fast and had a different language that we had in Oregon County. I did not know I was going into a foreign country. I could not understand what they were saying part of the time because they talked so fast. They did not use the words I was used to in Oregon County. The first thing I had to do is learn the language. Not once did I hear things like, ain't, you bet your bottom dollar, youns, or other things I was used to.

A man from Oregon County was a bigwig at Cheverlay Shell assembly plant, and I went to him. He said he would hire me. He gave me an application to fill out and bring back the next day. I never had to fill out an application before at Levi's or Larry Wallace's store, so I gave it to my wife and she filled it out for me. I took it back the next day. He told me that I needed to come back at 5 and someone would talk to me and then a man would show me my job. As I come in to work, they sent me to see this lady. She asked me if I wanted to join the Union. Thinking in my mind there will not be another civil war and if there is I could decide which side I wanted to be on then, so I said, "No."

The man came to take me to show me where I was going to be working. My goodness, I'd never seen so many people waiting to start to work. He took me to a place in front of a car that was about chest high in the air. The place had two yellow lines about four foot apart. He told me that in between those yellow lines would be my working area. I was not to cross over into the other person's line that was working on each side of me. He then said a loud horn will blow in a few minutes, and you will see the cars start moving. "Your job will be putting on shocks." He said, "When that line starts you have 15 seconds to put the shock on. You see this machine right here behind you, it with stretch 6 shocks at a time." Then he reached over and pulled a heavy looking drill to me and said, "There are two nuts that go into each shock, and this will put them on. The drill will stop when it gets them tight enough and if you twist it any more the nut will come off and go flying through the air."

I was relieved a little because as we were coming to the place he told me I had to be alert because sometimes there would be nuts flying through the air.

The man to my left was also new and after a few minutes everyone's face was black. He asked the foreman if he could smoke while working and the foreman had a funny looking smile on his face, when he said. "Sure". After a while, he tried to get his smoke out of his shirt pocket and failed, because of the 15 seconds he had to do his job. If you didn't get it done in 15 seconds, the car would move on down the line. The next try he got his smoke out of his pocket, but not enough time to light it. He kept trying to get time to reach in his shirt pocket for a light and finally made it. He was puffing on it but did not have enough time to take it out of his mouth. He decided he would spit it out, but that didn't work, it had stuck to his lips and I could hear a little yell. He told me if you didn't join the Union they would work you so hard you would quit.

We had rented an apartment in Forest Park, and it would make slums sleeping place look like a real nice home. We shared the bathroom with two other renters, and everything looked the same on the outside. I could never find where I lived, so my wife would put a light in the outside window to show me where we lived.

Enough was enough. My brother had called me from Tulsa, Oklahoma and said he thought he had me a job there if I would come. I told him I would leave hell tomorrow and come. I told my wife I was leaving in the morning if she wanted to go, pack her clothes. It had started raining as we entered Tulsa, and my brother came to meet us. He drove my car through the heavy traffic on to his house. The car had bald tires, and I could not keep it on wet pavement in traffic. My brother had worked in Tulsa for about two years. His boss and the man I was going to work for knew him and told him that the best employee he had was that farm boy from Oregon County. He said, "You hire his brother, you will have a good employee." He also told him a story about my brother. He told him he took his employees to eat shrimp, and my brother had never eaten shrimp. After finishing, everyone was counting their shrimp tails to see who eat the most shrimp. My brother did not have any tails on his plate; he ate them.

I went to Mr. Baylock's office, and he was a very nice man and he gave me an application to fill out, and he said set at that table over there. I had never filled out an application before. It looked like a piece of cake, it was going to be easy. It asked: my name, birth date, ss number, telephone number and wife's name and then I spotted a problem. It said, "Sex." Now that's a word that was forbidden in our house, Mom thought it was a dirty word. I wondered, do they want to know if I have sex? Then I got to thinking, maybe they are asking me if I wanted sex, and I was a married man. Being safe side I put, "No thank you."

After I had worked for him for awhile, he invited my wife and I out to his house and treated us like kings and queens. Lord, you shoulda seen that there house; it was so big I could get lost in it.

You know, I was just a thinking, I must have filled out the best application blank he had ever had. I think he put it in a fancy frame with glass on it and hung it in his fancy office. I should have to put chapter 1 on the top.

SOMETHING MISSING, A LONG SEARCH TO SATISFY THE MIND.

As a kid in Oregon County, my favorite thing to do was to play airplane. Three or four kids with no shoes, no shirt, pants legs rolled up above the hole in the knee of them. We played in an open field, feeling wild like a wild horse on the prairie. After getting out in the middle of the field one, one would say, "See over there in the corner by the woods, that is my landing and take off field." Then another would choose another corner and another a corner that would be his.

We really didn't know anything about airplanes. All we knew is that we would see them from time to time in the sky. They had big wings and traveled so fast that it was hard to get everyone out in the yard to see it. We all had a landing strip that was only a place to rest for awhile. When another wanted to land on the other one's strip, they had to circle it and get permission to land there. You had to keep flying unless you had landed.

We had both arms spread out like wings and ran as fast as your feet would carry you. It was exciting to be running and having the Oregon County wind blowing through your hair. On almost every occasion, one or more planes went to the ground, and you could fly by to see what happened. When a plane went down, one plane could land and check out the damage. Plane down, the boy had hit a rock with his big toe.

There were many rocks on the ground, and you had to navigate around them in order not to trip or stump your big toe. We were very seldom without white rags in our pockets to wipe the sweat or to blow our nose on. The White rag would be taken out and torn into a strip and put around the big toe with the tie on top. Those rocks were the best growing thing on our farm.

When I retired we acquired some acreage, and my wife's desire was to have a cabin with everything looking like Oregon County. God blessed us, and we found the isolated area that we were looking for to build a cabin on.

She told me what she wanted and I drew the plans up for the cabin, seeing in my mind what she was talking about.

After the cabin was built she was pleased, but she said, "Something is missing." I felt the same way. I started thinking maybe I should have moved back to Oregon County, but our grandkids are here, and we would be a long way from them which we did not want. One day I thought that it would be nice to have a six foot water fall into a pool with goldfish in it. Again I drew the plans and put the bracing on for the rocks to lay on for the waterfall. I had put the pond liner in and the frame up for the rocks, now I needed to put the trailer on the tractor and go pick rocks.

I soon found out what the "something was missing" was. We could not even find a rock as big as a dime. This took my mind back to all the rocks in Oregon County. We went to a place that sold rocks, and they got 8 cents a pound for the rocks. Again I thought of how many I had picked up and stomped my big toe in Oregon County. Just now in my mind those rocks in Oregon County looked good to me. We had located in a place as much like Oregon County as you could have, but something was missing, the rocks.

COMMENTS:
I met a woman who had grown up on a farm out near the Wilderness. They had 7 kids and picked up rocks every day. They had a 50 acre garden plot and eventually cleared it all. Jenny Underwood.

PURTY FLOWERS AND I DECLARE. LORDY, LORDY, LORDY

Our farm had a fence that ran from the garden all the way to the back of the 60 acres in Alton. The field that ran to the highway was about a fourth the size of the other side of the fence.

The larger section had a pile of rocks about 6 ft. High and about 10 ft. wide and it was too big for a cow to get over. Every year it would get longer and higher. Every spring when the land was plowed, rocks had to be picked up and hauled to the stack before planting could be done. I asked my Dad many times where did all these rocks come from and when are they going to stop coming, because we pick them up every year. My dad would say each time, "This land is really good for growing rocks, I guess."

We usually had about two cuttings of hay off the part that had not been planted. We did not bail the hay; someone else would. They would take half of it and leave our half on the ground. We would have to haul it to the barn before it rained. It might not have been hay; it probably was weeds that we called hay,

but the cows liked it. You had to get it in the barn before it got wet, or it would get rotten on you.

As the weeds would grow, something special would happen or at least I thought it was something special. A weed with a big yellow flower would grow. To me patches of it were beautiful. You could see the bloom of the big weed starting to burst out, and it would be there overnight.

Playing out in the yard I would watch from a distance, and all at once there it would be there after a rain. I would run in the house and say, "Mom, come and look the beautiful flowers have bloomed out. Can I go out in the field and play in them?"

Mom would come outside and say something to herself like, "I declare I think there is more of them than there has ever been." My Mom would then say, "Don't you get too close to them, you will get chiggers."

My mother really thought chiggers come from the ball in the middle of the flowers that the petal stuck out from. My mom would go to the other side and look out over that field and say, "Looks like we are going to have them on both sides. But for right now tell you Dad to close the gate where the cows can't get over on the other side."

I asked my Mom, "What kind of flower is that anyhow"? She told me they were dog fennels and to stay away from them. (I don't know if that really was the name of them or if that's just what we called them). Then I remembered if the cows eat that weed it would make the milk almost undrinkable.

We told Dad and he said to himself aloud, "I declare if it isn't one thing it's another. Well, youngins might as well get use to drinking some bad tasting milk. Lordy, lordy, lordy."

Sure enough, all three of Dad's Lordy, Lordy, Lordies were in my glass at the table. It was almost like someone tasting moonshine that didn't drink. That weed brought up other questions. I asked, "Why do some people call it moonshine and others call it white lightning?"

As my dad reached his long arm up to scratch his head as always when he was thinking, his answer came. " Well, the best I can figure it, I don't drink anymore, but that stuff is made by moonlight where the smoke won't be noticeable. Smoke draws a lot of eyes, but at night it is less noticeable. The name moonshine is what the country folk call it, but when it gets into the city, I guess moonshine is just not a very good name. They call it white lightning. I know that milk

tastes bad, but we got to drink it, it won't hurt you." Then he said, "I declare. Lordy, lordy, lordy. That seems the most this old farm can give me anymore.

YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY BABY

One thing that was overwhelming when I visited Oregon County is this; I found that you had changed. Even to the smallest detail, people in Thayer and Alton were just the same as people in the thriving little town that I moved from about 15 years ago, when I wanted a more simple life. It seemed strange; you passed me because I wanted to go back to a more relaxing atmosphere. I am sure that some places still exist around Thayer and Alton that I did not see and could be behind time like myself. No, you haven't stood still.

I have to go back one more time and maybe many other times if the Lord permits it. In this story, you will say, "There is a lot of misspelled words in there." When they are not misspelled by the language, we used when I was like nine or ten years of age. I want to write this story in those words, but like you. WE HAVE COME A LONG WAY BABY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My birth name was Billie Ferrell Combs. Before I got too old I changed it to Bill but my older sisters still called me Billy, while after a period of time my family started calling me Bill.

I was the eighth child of eleven kids of Floyd and Amanda. They were called by the younger generations Uncle Floyd and Aunt Manda.

I was born at Cotton Creek, Missouri in Oregon County. We lived there in two locations a short period of time and then moved to Jobe, Missouri and had 360 acres there. It was between Frederick and Dry Creek that we tried to raise corn and other things, but the land was poorer than we was.

No one at that time had enough money to buy much of anything. My Dad's health was getting bad. Finally a blind man and his son came by one day. His son told him about the place. There was some tall weeds grown up in cow manure. My Dad moved the blind man's hand over the weeds, to tell him there was a lot of grazing. The blind man bought the place for $1,500. My Dad then bought a place for $1,300 setting up on a hill with a nice smokehouse and a good barn. This place was three miles out of Alton, Missouri, unless you were walking from Alton to home on a cold dark night. Then it seemed much farther.

We hand milked 18 cows and sold milk. We filled the barn with hay that

Dad would get cut on the halves. The main food supply was wild meat and greens gathered from the fence lines, but our stomachs were never empty.

My Mom stayed pregnant most of the time, but put in a full days work every day along with the rest of us. I think all of those old farms were better kid producers than they were for corn, cane and other crops.

My Dad was a friend to us and taught us about life early in life. He had his rules and you better not break them. Dad had me under his wing longer than he had the other kids because something happened. There were four years difference between myself and my younger brother.

My Father had the best education you could have in his young years and that was an eighth grade education. You could teach with an eighth grade education in those days. He was born in 1897, and read papers with different important things to many that did not know how to read or write.

My Mother was an orphan from the age of 6 years old. She would stay a week at different relatives houses and then go to another. She survived well and got a third grade education.

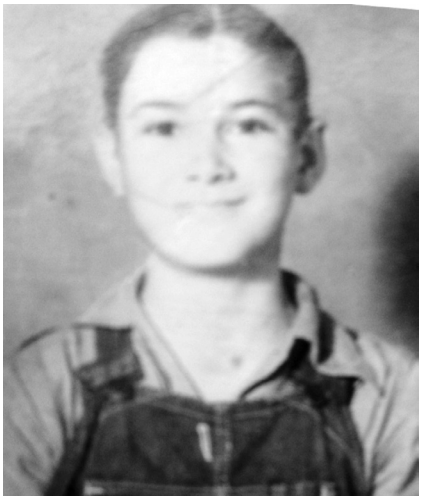
My Dad became my Mother's guardian when she was fifteen, because she had no one to sign for her to marry my Dad. They were married on or the day before her sixteenth birthday.

We had four seasons on that little farm. We had to take advantage of each one of them. There was spring which was breaking ground and planting. There was summer in which you picked blackberries and other things. There was fall when you shocked fodder and cut cane. After that, school would start again. Two weeks in September we were excused from school to go to Kennett, Missouri or Arkansas to pick cotton and live in those cold cotton shacks. Butchering of the hogs was a real important time. Mom would make enough lye soap to last until next year. That soap was used for washing clothes, washing our faces or any other place we would need soap. There's more in the book about hog killing time.

Tuesdays of each week was wash day. It was the day my older brother who was a good hunter, went out and killed seven squirrels that made us one good meal. He had to go after work for another meal that week also.

I grew up real fast between my Dad's teachings and my older brother who was always trying to make me cry.

My Dad's rules were simple but strict. If you want to run away from home, you better know the way back because I ain't going to come looking for you. When you finished the eighth grade you didn't have to go to school anymore and you will support yourself. I guess that meant that Mom would no longer put three biscuits with cold lard in them for our lunch. I don't know of much other support. You will give your Mom a little spending money each week and I want to see some savings. (He always said, "Don't tell me what you made, tell me what you saved.") If one of you kids gets into trouble with the law, you will lose your last name, "Combs."



Bill Combs

Not one of us failed to finish high school, and some of us went to college. No one ran away from home. We were proud to give Mom some spending money to buy thread and other things to make our clothes.

I liked high school because they played sports and as far as I know, I still hold one game scoring record of 70 points in one game in basketball. I was offered scholarships from many colleges but was afraid to take any of them. I did go to college after leaving Oregon County with a Bachelors of Arts Degree.

Several years after I started my work career I went with a company as a salesman and was second top producer in the U.S. The Vice President came to the branch that I worked for and wanted me to make a talk on how it was done. Just before I started to talk, I could only think of hard work made it possible, and I was going to tell it like it was. He was watching behind a window in the hallway and I wasn't comfortable talking any other way than the way I was raised up. Several of the people that were listening were beginning to get amused with lots of laughter. Even the bigwig outside the window was laughing. Then I told them I was from Oregon County, Missouri and was having a hard time being comfortable trying to be someone that I am not. I told them my name is Bill Combs. I am what I am and I am not what I am not. I knew my career was over and I could not eat that wooden, gold covered placque that they gave me. The V.P. called me in the branch manager's office and told me to report to him at this office at 8 A.M. the next morning. Well, the next morning I headed towards his office to be fired. I guess it was on the seventh floor of a big glass building. He invited me in and complimented me on my talk. I told him I was a farm boy and I guess talk funny to some people. They kept laughing at me. He said, "Come

with me." He opened the door next to his office that had a file cabinet and fancy desk and chair. He said, "This will be your office from now on." I didn't exactly feel safe being that high behind a piece of glass.

He said the company has two regions, half of the U.S. covers each region. I am making you regional manager and I want you to give the type of talk you gave yesterday to each branch and you will be in over 46 branches. Well, this job set me up pretty good. But I had to be in the air every day traveling from one state to another.

Eventually I retired. I am proud I am from Oregon County, Missouri and I still ain't no one except who I am and don't want to be no one else.

I started writing country and western songs shortly after I left Oregon County, and then my heart fell into writing something to remember.

I am just Bill Combs and I will always be from Oregon County, Missouri. My desire is to give back to Oregon County a little bit of what they have given me to carry through life.